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ABSTRACT

This document consists of the three 1999 issues of The Bernard van Leer Foundation's "Early Childhood Matters." This periodical, addressed to practitioners in the field of early childhood education, evolved from an in-house publication directed to projects funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. Articles in the February 1999 edition include: (1) "Effectiveness for Children" (Smale); (2) "Reaching for the Moon" (Anandalakshmy); (3) Real Engagement by Children" (Bartlett); (4) "Tapping a Key Resource" (Tolfree and Woodhead); (5) "Peru: Children's Parliaments--Hearing Children" (Barrientos); (6) "India: Bal Sansad--Children's Parliaments"; and (7) "Driving a Car for the First Time: Teachers, Caregivers and a Child-Driven Approach" (Meerdink). The June 1999 issue focuses on effective early childhood development (ECD) programs at international, governmental, regional, and country levels. The articles include: (1) "Ireland: Strengthening Families for Life" (Hazlett); (2) "Bolivia: Costs and Benefits" (van der Gaag and Tan); (3) "Early Childhood Development as an International Policy Issue" (Landers); (4) "Kenya: Working for Viability through Project Partners" (Jahani); (5) "Southern Africa: Guidelines for Good Practice" (Moshoeshoe); and (6) "Cambodia: Continuing to Learn--For the Benefit of Children" (Redd Barna Combodia). Articles in the October 1999 issue are: (1) "Mapping the Contours of Effective Programming: The Effectiveness Initiative 1999- 2002"; (2) "When ECD Works: Mapping the Contours of Effective Programming" (Salole and Evans); and (3) "Stories We Tell, Moments That Stay with Us" (Ilfeld). Each issue contains information on foundation publications and announcements related to foundation activities. (KB)

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# Early Childhood Matters

## The Bulletin of the Bernard van Leer Foundation

## 1999

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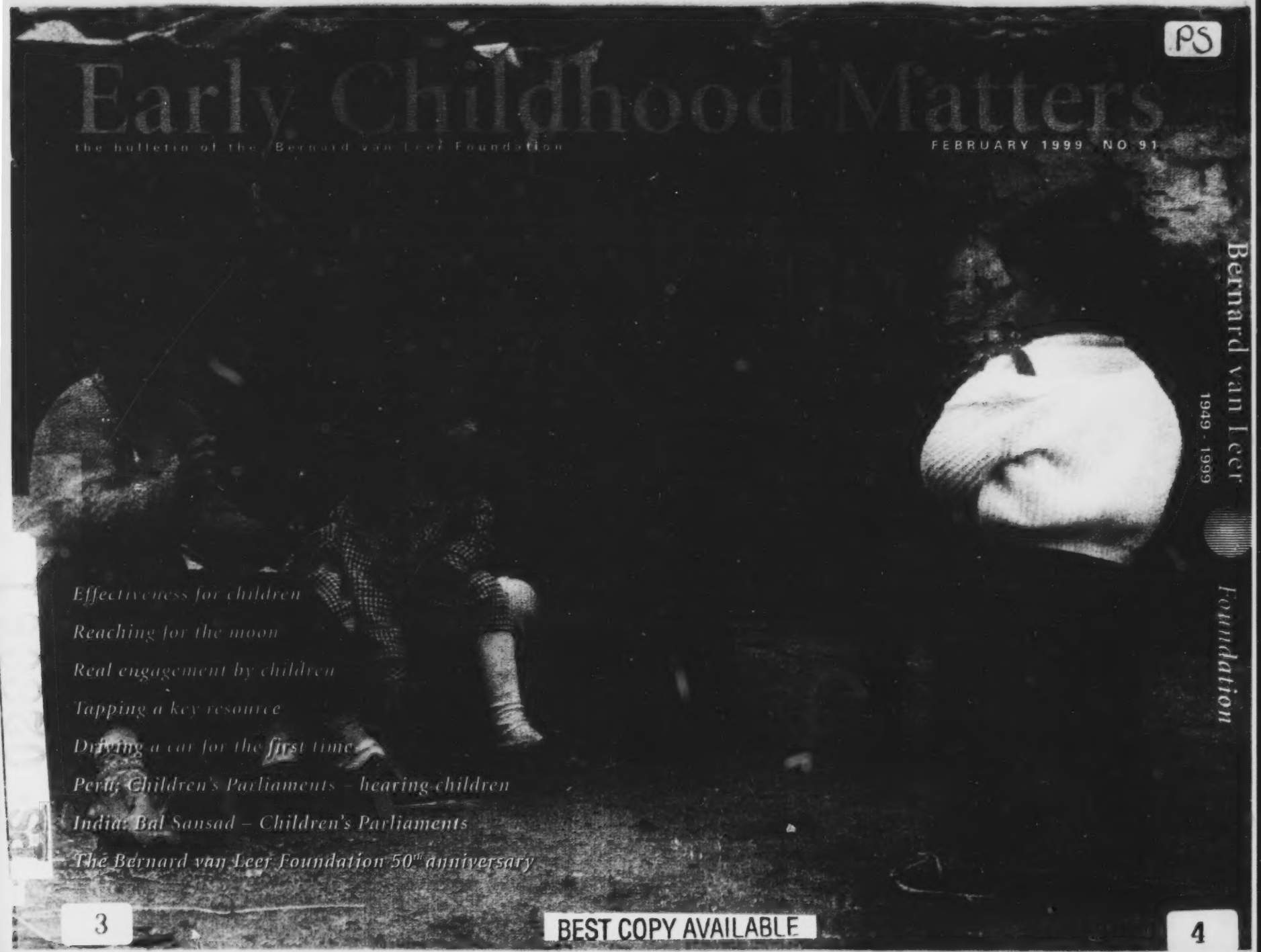
# Early Childhood Matters

the bulletin of the Bernard van Leer Foundation

FEBRUARY 1999 NO 91



Bernard van Leer
1949 - 1999
Foundation

*Effectiveness for children*

*Reaching for the moon*

*Real engagement by children*

*Tapping a key resource*

*Driving a car for the first time*

*Peru: Children's Parliaments – hearing children*

*India: Bal Sansad – Children's Parliaments*

*The Bernard van Leer Foundation 50th anniversary*



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Bernard van Leer Foundation
PO Box 82334, 2508 EH
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Tel: +31 (0)70 351 2040
Fax: +31 (0)70 350 2373
email: registry@bvleerf.nl

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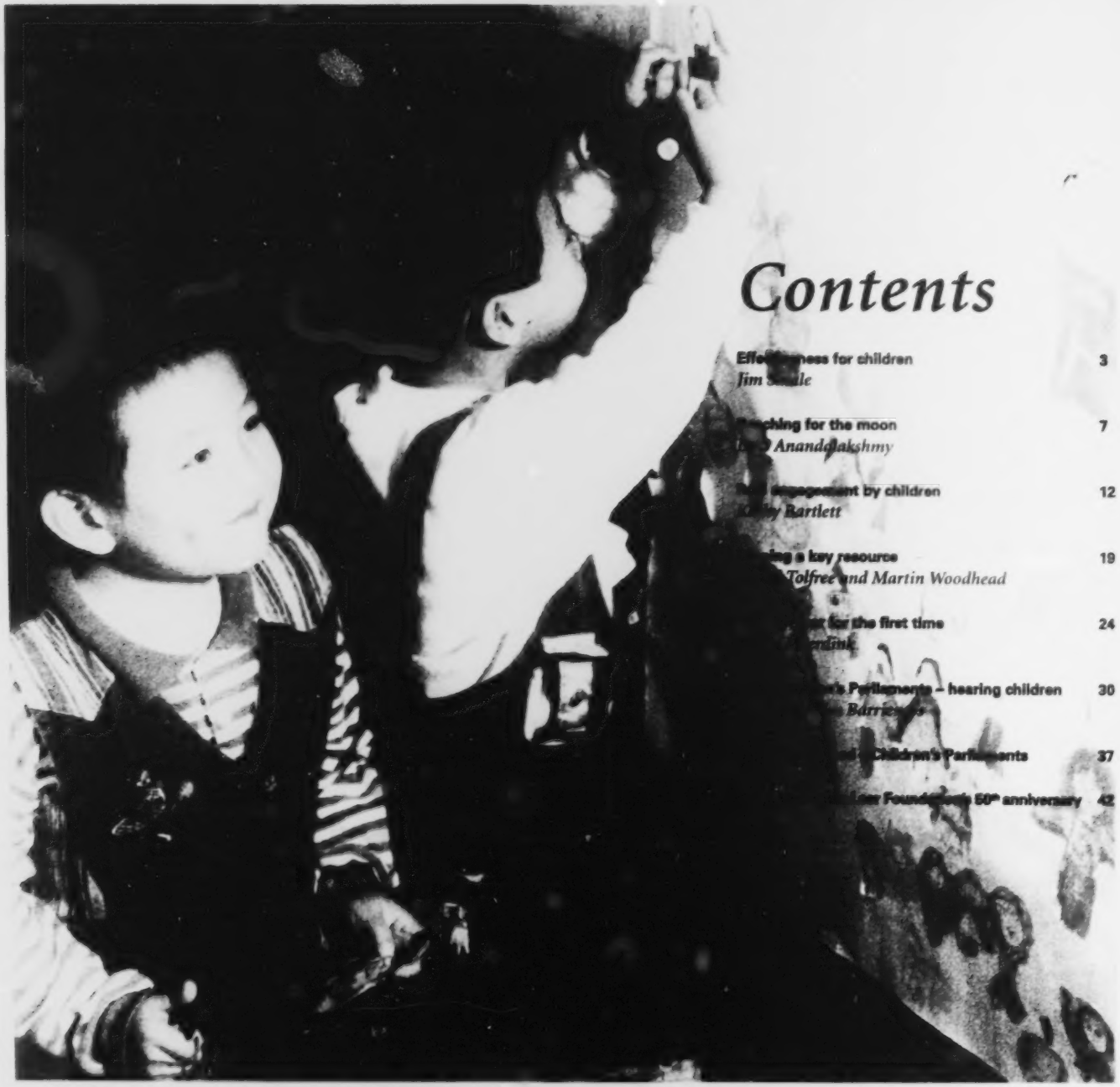
As well as *Early Childhood Matters* the Foundation produces a wide range of publications about early childhood development. All are available – free of charge for single copies – to organisations or individuals interested in this field.
A publications list is also available: please contact the Foundation at the address shown on the back cover.



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# Effectiveness for Children

*Under the general title of 'Effectiveness for whom?' the next few editions of Early Childhood Matters will consider elements of what makes early childhood development (ECD) programmes effective for different stakeholders and actors. In this, it will be drawing from, and contributing to, the Effectiveness Initiative, a major new undertaking by the Foundation and a number of partner organisations about effectiveness in ECD programmes. To launch the series, this edition considers 'Effectiveness for Children' by reviewing ideas and programmes of work that seek the views of children, and that value children as contributors to, and participants in, all aspects of ECD.*

Taken as a whole, the articles challenge the idea of putting together programmes with little or no direct input from the children themselves, and without an understanding of how individual children experience childhood. They demonstrate the value of knowing what young children think, see, believe, want or need; discovering how they interpret or understand their experiences; and being aware of how they respond internally to events, happenings and programme activities. Within the articles are examples of young children contributing ideas, solutions, criticisms and ways forward; and of their initiatives becoming a focus of interest and development within programmes.

In researching for this edition, it became clear that relatively little work is being done to get at the ideas, perceptions and experiences of children under eight years, or to discover their responses to early childhood programmes. This has left a gap:

> A cursory analysis of data on children suggests that, aside from some information on health ... and education, most development agencies do not as a rule collect much information about children and childhoods. Much of what has been compiled is written by adults rather than by children themselves and reflects a paternalistic attitude on the part of adults who feel that they know about children and childhoods because they have themselves gone through childhood. There is very little [distinct and separated] data on children's lives and relatively little is actually known about children's lives[1].

Yet we need such data. For example, without trying to find out what is really happening inside children's heads, we cannot presume to judge how well they are performing:

> What constitutes a personal achievement for a two year old may be quite different from what is defined as such by an adult experimenter ... The experimenter who puts a puzzle in front of a child most likely defines success as completion of the puzzle. But a two year old may make a circle or a train out of the puzzle pieces and evaluate her accomplishment in terms of that goal. For these reasons, observing children in situations in which success is defined by an adult provides limited evidence on young toddlers' reactions to achievements[2].

Failing to be aware of such inner responses constitutes a failure to support that child adequately. It also indicates a more general failure to recognise and build on children's abilities and interests, the range of which – lamentably – continues to surprise most of us. This range can include the ability of children as young as three to deal constructively with

Turkey: an expert in communicating with children ... and her son
MOCEF
(Entry for the 1998 Poster Competition)

philosophical concepts[3] and that of children of seven to grapple successfully with political issues[4]. The consequence of this kind of failure is that programmes are not as effective as they could be.

### Childhood and children's views

Underpinning each article are beliefs drawn from extensive experience. These include: that holistic development promotes confident and creative participation; that children will show what they can do if given the opportunity; and that children are natural analysers and problem solvers.

In the first article, Dr S Anandalakshmy questions the limited nature of some ECD programmes. She uses an ancient Tamil text from India to justify a move away from programmes that concentrate only on cognitive development, language development, hygiene, cleanliness, nutrition and so on; or that are valued only for visible and quantifiable results – for example, better performance in primary school. She calls for programmes to take the concept of 'holistic' seriously by developing what she calls the 'Nine Cs' – Competence, Communication, Creativity, Confidence, Curiosity, Control, Conviviality, Compassion and Cooperation (page 7).

Next, Kathy Bartlett reviews children's participation in programmes, as she sees it after more than 20 years in the field. She postulates explanations for the limited experience that programmes seem to have in this area, surveys a range of approaches to finding out what is going on inside children's heads, and poses a series of questions that invite discussion about how to make further progress (page 12).

David Tolfree and Martin Woodhead set out the arguments for practitioners and policy makers finding out what children see, think, feel and believe. Then they suggest practical ways forward with young children. In this, they draw on their pioneering efforts in not only getting at this knowledge, but also in recognising and taking advantage of children's ability to work with it themselves as they analyse their situations and come up with practical ideas. In line with their age, cultural background and development opportunities, children are shown to be resourceful and valuable partners (page 19).

Some of the pitfalls and complexities of preparing childcare workers to help children express themselves are covered in the article by Drs Jorien Meerdink (page 24). She advocates a child-driven approach in which the development needs of children are established with the help of children themselves. The article describes and discusses how teachers and childcare workers were trained to elicit information from young children by asking open questions. It also shows that children often coped with this exercise much better than did the trainees.

Two of the articles discuss Children's Parliaments, one in India, the other in Peru. In each, young children experience processes of debate and discussion, and see how problems are tackled and solutions proposed. However, in many other ways they are very different.

The Children's Parliaments in Peru are a tool in a programme designed to enhance children's resilience. The key idea is that they directly enable children to express themselves through showing what makes them happy and sad, and what their hopes are for the future. A child-determined agenda is thereby established, and a programme of appropriate work is put together to build on the happy, eliminate the sad and help children move towards realising their hopes. Expressing, analysing and taking action are seen as a preparation for participating successfully in the democratic processes of their societies. The project has also developed new approaches specifically to enable young children to express themselves, based on creative use of drawings and other pictorial aids (page 30).

In India, the Children's Parliaments have developed naturally within a wider programme of interventions, all of which include a focus on child development.

There is considerable formality: there are political parties, elections and ministers with responsibility for areas of interest that mirror those of the implementing project. This can be seen as a preparation for possible participation in formal democratic processes later in life (page-37).

In the context of the topic of this edition, it is worth repeating that children are very good at finding things out from each other. The October 1998 edition of *Early Childhood Matters* featured an article from Zimbabwe about Child Researchers who interview young children in appropriate ways about developmentally significant topics in their communities.

### An unfinished job

In bringing this edition together, the biggest problem was finding enough examples of appropriate practice with children under eight. While some of the articles deal specifically with that age group, others are about groups of children from four years to twelve or older. In these, there often seems to be no specific provision for young children, apparently because their passive involvement is considered enough at this stage: they are learning how others express themselves, contribute and participate. Later this will bear fruit. Another gap is the lack of direct discussion here about how to judge the value of what children express in relation to other data and considerations.

Finally, the most important experts are not represented in this edition: parents. In the coming months the Foundation hopes to carry out a small initiative designed to help parents express themselves and exchange views internationally about many topics – including communication with their children. I expect to feature the outcomes in a future edition.

Overall, while this edition demonstrates the importance of inclusive, child-centred approaches, it also shows that much still has to be learned: this is an undeveloped area and only tentative results are emerging. We will return to these aspects of 'Effectiveness for Children' regularly.

### In the next edition

The next edition of *Early Childhood Matters* continues the theme of 'Effectiveness for Whom?' by considering what makes ECD programmes effective in the eyes of policy and decision makers. I want to explore two key areas: 1. why it is effective to support ECD in general; and 2. what it is that makes ECD programmes effective. I am interested in both major articles and short pieces that may be anecdotal. Some possible questions about the first area include:

- Why do you support ECD programmes?
- Have any particular experiences made you change your mind about the importance of ECD programmes? What were they?
- What factors influence you in deciding to allocate resources to ECD programmes instead of competing programmes?

Some possible questions about the second area include:

- What elements make a programme effective for you?
- How do you assess whether a programme is effective?
- What outcomes do you look for?
- What mechanisms and instruments do you use to measure impact?
- How do you assess whether you are getting value for money?

Please do contact me before the middle of March 1999 so we can develop ideas together.

*Jim Smale*
*Editor*


1. Leelhani Singh and H Ravi Trivedy, *Approaches to Child Participation: a discussion paper*, (1996) Save the Children Fund (UK) India Office, New Delhi, India.

2. Stipek D, Recchia S, McClintic S, Self-evaluation in young children, (1992) *Monographs for the Society for Research in Child Development*, Serial No 226, Vol 97, No 1, Society for Research in Child Development, University of Chicago Journals Division, Chicago, USA, p 23.

3. Sigurborsdottir I, Philosophy With Children In Foldaborg: Development project in Foldaborg, a pre-school in Reykjavik, Iceland, for children from 1-6 years' in *OMEP International Journal of Early Childhood*, Volume 30, No 1, (1998) omep World Organisation for Early Childhood and Education, dcdpc Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1A 0HH, England.

4. "Auto's zijn vies" Ook kinderen zijn politiek bewust' ('Cars are dirty' Children are also politically aware) in *NRC* 19 September 1998, The Netherlands.





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Dr S Anandalakshmy

*For Dr S Anandalakshmy, teaching has been a vocation, a profession, a passion. After setting up and starting a lively and innovative school in Madras, she moved to New Delhi to teach at Lady Irwin College. She established the Post-Graduate Department of Child Development – which offered a rigorous and people-friendly course to young women – and was Director of the college from 1983 to 1991. She was also involved in the Mobile Creches (a voluntary organisation for the families of labourers on construction sites in Delhi and Bombay) from its inception, serving as Chairperson for six years.*

*In this article she argues that, if early childhood development programmes are to be effective for children, they have to be holistic, and profoundly child centred. That includes positively supporting healthy emotional development in young children. To make her case, she draws on an ancient Tamil text and on a recent best-selling book from the USA:* Emotional Intelligence[1].

# *Reaching for the moon*

An ancient Tamil text talks of reaching for the moon as it discusses one stage of early childhood development. The moon is both metaphor and symbol and has many layers of meaning. 'Reaching for the moon' alludes to gaining humour, capriciousness and dream-state. I link this to the need of children for a healthy emotional development, something that is best considered in the gentle light of the moon with its fuzzy boundaries, rather than in the harsh light of the sun. The light of the moon allows the development of the child's sense of self to be given sympathetic support in differing and shifting blends at varied moments: hard edged certainty is inappropriate.

When one sets up a daycare centre or preschool, one starts with providing a safe environment with trusted caregivers, following a programme that includes hygiene, health and supplementary nutrition, and moves on to include play. In the course of growing up in the company of others, children learn listening, responding, speaking, communicating intent, seeking to know, exploring, trying out, establishing social

India: a bubbling child-centred preschool
Taking Care of our Children Project
SEWA
photo: Gerry Salole
(Entry for the 1998 Poster Competition)

# *Pillai Tamizh: stages of infancy and early childhood*

contact. These are intrinsic to childhood, children do them naturally.

However, while hygiene and health, and the development of cognitive and language abilities are usually specifically included in the preschool programme, the emotional development of children is often left out. My view is that the immense potential that young children have can only be developed into power and strength if there is affection from those who spend time with children; if all activities are exciting and enjoyable; and if challenges are stimulating and unthreatening. For me, play, playfulness and a sense of fun are of the essence. Together with these, warmth and a non-judgemental attitude to both competence and incompetence, constitute the 'primordial soup' from which the central self of children emerges, a central self that depends on the expression and cultivation of healthy emotions.

I also believe that healthy emotional development is the basis for the future system of children that, among other things, will help them to avoid psychological problems, to handle situations better, and to fare well academically and in interpersonal relationships. It will also help them to deal with success and to treat negative experiences without a sense of personal humiliation or failure. But this has to be actively supported, first because it may not develop naturally even under optimal conditions; and secondly because, when it is developed in the early years, it helps psychological health throughout life.

### Making a good soup

Based on my experiences with young children over many years, I have developed a recipe for that primordial soup mentioned earlier. Into it go myth, song and verse, fun, fantasy and humour. People may argue that myth is irrelevant to young children. But myth is the collective unconscious of a people, to use a Jungian[2] phrase – within our culture, it's what we all believe. By using this myth in playing with their children, mothers anchor children to their culture and to the cognitive idiom of their people. This enables a contextualising of self, while the make-believe element encourages creativity and imagination.

For their part, dance and music are full of the kinds of metaphors that reflect what we all take for granted as our cultural reality. They make an early impact on children; and what is learned through dance, or music, or through verses, is also learned better – and provides a lot of enjoyment.

In turn, fantasy and imagination open up whole new worlds for children. This does not stop them developing a keen sense of reality, nor does it confuse them. The secret is not to replace reality, nor to overwhelm them with fantasy. Observe what happens if you make a drawing of a baby and show it to children: they'll pretend to be a baby and 'cry' or lovingly pat the drawing. They know it's not a real baby, it is fantasy play in which they engage happily.



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### Seasoning the soup

There is so much fun when you deal in the undefined, or add extra elements to something, or playfully juxtapose two unlikely things. Children have a natural sense of humour: as young as two and three, I have seen them creating their own jokes and laughing at them – they know a joke from serious stuff.

> Away down south where bananas grow
> A grasshopper stepped on an elephant's toe
> The elephant said with tears in his eyes
> 'Pick on somebody your own size.'

Children do see the point of this little rhyme, and when they laugh, you understand how humour is one of the most human aspects of human beings. We, as adults, use humour hesitantly with children because we are a little too serious about what we do.

### Rationalising the recipe

A nourishing soup is necessarily complex. Rationalise this recipe and you reduce its goodness. For example, some people stress the need for a scientific temperament and argue for a more mechanistic approach. But science is full of questions; uncertainty is of the essence; and creativity and imagination are the most valuable faculties for the creative scientist and the inventor. Artistic and scientific activities are not necessarily pursued by totally different sorts of people: creativity and imagination are important to both and have the same source. That means that they need the same kind of nourishment. It also means that we must not focus on the obviously useful at the expense of those lovely 'useless' activities that relate to fantasy. I defend the useless – that which is not immediately useful – and I claim that there is a great advantage in a large horizon of information, experiences and so on. We need a wide sweep that encompasses, rather than a narrow neck that restricts.

### The wrong soup?

One has to answer seriously the counter arguments of those who stress legitimate priorities such as health, hygiene and nutrition. My suggestion is that the imparting of those services should include the fostering of emotional development. It is in no sense a question of either/or. Similarly, preparation for primary schools is an important objective but it is not a question of preschools either emphasising cognitive development and measurable achievements or supporting only healthy emotional development. They can keep in mind wider foci: what children need to be, to know, to be capable of in life. For example, if language and verbalisation are on the agenda, the context selected for the work could easily include social conversation, feelings and compassion for those in pain.

This approach may appear to cause conflict at key times – for example, at the time of transition from preschool to a formal primary school. Primary school teachers know that children who attend child-centred preschools tend to be happy, self-confident and ebullient: they are forever exploring and doing new things and coming up with wonderful new ideas and pieces of work. In short, they don't look as if they will do well in such areas as formal tests. Teachers need to recognise and build on the fact that these children are actually very well equipped to deal with any situation that they encounter, and to succeed in tests or examinations or anything else.

The implication is that the formal system must be more child friendly, and must continue the preschool initiated support of the development of the central self. At the same time, it must resist attempts to impose the adult dichotomy of work and play on children. For children, work is playing with things, playing with peers, playing at roles. Playing requires no external motivation: children love challenges and they love to play, and thereby to work, to learn, to know.

### What exactly must this soup nourish?

A couple of years ago, I read a book called *Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman and I realised afresh that the 20th century has been a celebration of left brain functions: language; cognition; and numeracy. At the same time there has been an inadvertent neglect of the right brain functions: creativity; imagination; intuition and so on. Although there has been virtually an explosion of knowledge in several fields, insights about human development do not seem to have kept pace and we have engendered 'emotional illiteracy' (Goleman's term for a lack of emotional development). In contrast, the categories of infancy and early childhood developed in the Tamil

# *Play*

tradition reflect the importance of nurturing, and of affectionate and playful interaction between children and their parents. For me, finding the Tamil tradition was like finding an amber gemstone washed up by the tide: it sharpened my perceptions about ourselves and about the young of our species.

The soup that I am steadily revealing the recipe for, nourishes exactly those attributes in children that together indicate healthy emotional development and show that the central self is in place. I call them the 'Nine Cs': Competence, Communication and Creativity; Confidence, Curiosity and Control; and Conviviality, Compassion and Cooperation. You will notice that I have grouped them in threes.

The first group consists of Competence, Communication and Creativity. The resources and opportunities required for fostering these are usually found in good preschools – for instance, materials and space for art, provision and opportunities for the development of speaking and listening, and opportunities for the development of basic competence. Most teachers and parents accept these as necessary for children. Moreover, there are tangible – or at least measurable – aspects to them.

The second group is directly related to healthy emotional development: Confidence, Curiosity and Control. However, they may not be provided for. Confidence would be welcomed in most places but its absence may go unnoticed. Similarly, when children do not show Curiosity, teachers don't necessarily feel the need to comment or react – in some cultures, Curiosity may even be considered bad manners! On the other hand, the absence of Control will generate attention.

Conviviality, Compassion and Cooperation – the third set of attributes – are also central to healthy emotional development, but may be invisible or absent because they are not identified as needing conscious cultivation. They only develop in interactions with others, especially the peer group. We assume, perhaps, that these will emerge as the by-products of the highly individualised preschool agenda, but that assumption may be wrong. The preschool must not only be child centred, it must be children centred.

How can these attributes be developed? It's not a matter of saying 'OK, it's now 10 in the morning so we'll have a go at giving children warm and positive personalities'. The moon metaphor gives us the feel of the approach; and this should be complemented by teachers acting as themselves, as fellow human beings. Then their guidance will emerge naturally and it will be the right sort of guidance. The settings will also develop slowly. These may be the ones that children already share with their teachers, with just a little emphasis here, or taking advantage of something that is naturally occurring there. Or they may not have a physical existence: they may only be created in the minds of the children.

One can also make things lively: that will help simply because children are happy. Find the fun, laugh a bit, make these natural day to day elements in the



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environment that children experience. In addition, the nine Cs develop through play; through interaction; through children talking; through realising how they feel; through knowing that their concerns are taken into account; through using their imagination; through being aware of the needs of others; and so on. Preschool children are not too young for this.

Let me illustrate how to support the development of Compassion. We consider this as abstract and difficult but only because we try to protect young children from knowing too much about sad things. Yet young children do feel compassion and want to express it. For example, one of my former students lost her mother but still went to work in her preschool. She was naturally very sad and one child sensed this and brought a favourite toy and just placed it on her lap. So Compassion was there and was expressed tenderly.

One way to approach the development of Compassion is by helping children become aware of others, who they are, who their siblings are, and so on: Compassion starts with a sense of other people. Children themselves are a great source of this information: their own names, their family, their own history, and so on. Work like this needs to be done more consciously – but it only takes a little thinking or rethinking on the teacher's part. It is also a matter of taking advantage of situations that arise, or of using fantasy and creativity to enable children to experience and analyse suitable incidents or situations. For example, when one of the children is absent from school for a while, get the others to find out why. Upon return the child should be given the chance to tell the others about the reasons for being absent.

## Digesting the soup

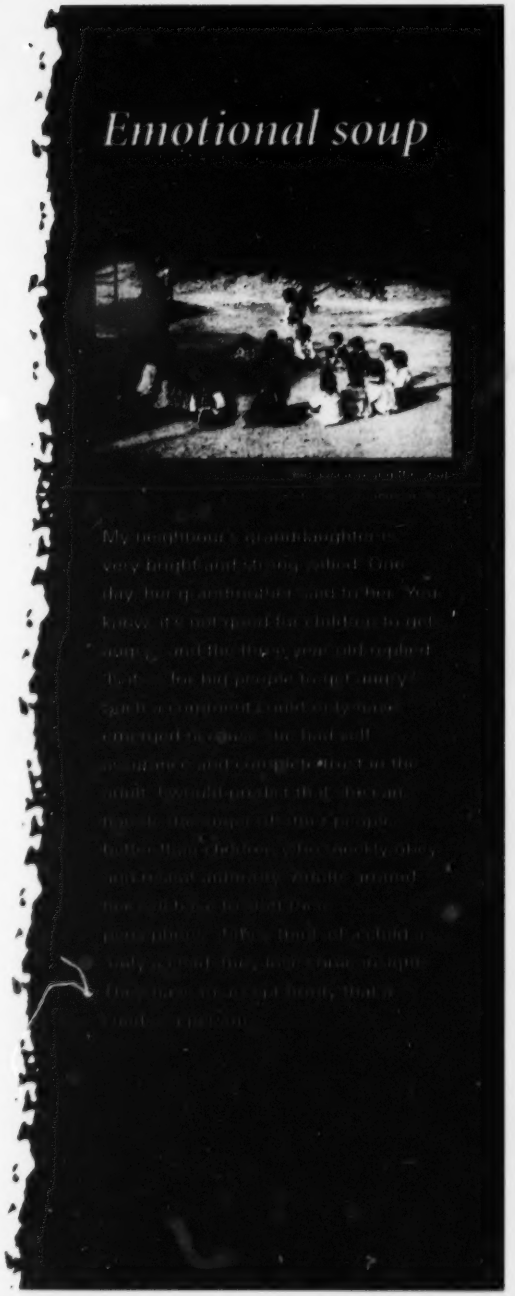
I have observed many good preschools where, typically, each child is received warmly, there is a well-planned schedule of activities, the children's artwork is up on the walls, and there is a word for the parents who come to take the children home. Yet, even when everything seems right, I have found that most communication from the teachers consists of instructions to the children. Only a small portion goes into actual conversation. There is almost no communication in the reciprocal sense of the word and the opinions of children are seldom solicited.

There is no manual or handbook to move from this situation to one that naturally and effectively supports the emotional development of young children, that helps to give them that central self. But I hope I have shown how the preschool teacher can help to navigate the child's moon landing!

1 Goleman D, *Emotional Intelligence*, (1995) Bantam Books, New York, USA

2 Carl Jung was a Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist who founded analytical psychology. He proposed and developed concepts such as extrovert and introvert personalities, archetypes and the collective unconscious.



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# *Real engagement by children*

**Kathy Bartlett**

*Kathy Bartlett has been involved for nearly 20 years in programmes for children during their early years. Initially she worked as a preschool to lower primary school teacher in California. From there she worked in Honduras for a local NGO which set up 'family centres' to provide preschool education for young children in rural Choluteca. Later, in Costa Rica, she undertook her PhD research exploring rural working women's strategies for childcare and also worked as a trainer for the US Peace Corps' Integrated ECD Programme which was run in cooperation with local health, education and social welfare departments. Since 1992, she has been working for the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) as Programme Officer for Education with particular responsibility for the AKF's Young Children and the Family portfolio of projects.*

Young children are the key individuals – the direct beneficiaries – in ECD programmes, often alongside those who care for them, perhaps as part of the same family and community. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child includes participation as one of children's rights and, based on hundreds of project experiences from around the world, there is general agreement that ECD programmes are more likely to be effective and sustainable when participation by all the stakeholders – especially parents, other family and community members – is enabled and encouraged. By participation I mean a real engagement, according to age/ability, in all stages and levels of a programme, from conceptualisation, through operation to evaluation. I also mean this engagement to include the confident expressions of views, perceptions, feelings, ideas, reactions and so on.

In this article, I want to share a few questions and ideas on whether and how we, as ECD workers, advocates, supervisors, researchers, donors, and so on, understand and take account of that real engagement; how this is defined by various stakeholders; and how these concepts interact and influence what happens in a 'real life' ECD programme.

I have been thinking about these matters as a result of the project reports and evaluations from different countries I have read or written over the years. Such reports often include important information on changes in children including their growth and weight, cognitive and social development, and so on. But they tend to pay inadequate attention to what is happening within children and to their views – including feedback about how they experience programmes.

In addition, discussions with those most closely involved in ECD projects – such as caregivers or supervisors – show a wide range of responses regarding what they describe as children's participation. Many bring up the more 'conventional' kinds of participation such as attending, or taking part in activities. But it isn't clear that they are thinking about participation in the sense of real engagement.





India: five way communication within a family group
photo: Jean-Luc Ray
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Uganda: *watch and I'll show you what I mean*
photo: Jean-Luc Ray
© The Aga Khan Foundation

### The problems

Part of the problem at present seems to be a lack of appropriate tools and/or methods for capturing a broader definition for participation by children that signifies real engagement. There is also the very real dilemma of the lack of many ECD workers' time to record and reflect observations as well as document discussions with parents and families related to the children's involvement and interest. Finally, there may be a need for additional skills (and follow-up encouragement and support) so that those who work directly with children become more confident in using a wider variety of methods for hearing and documenting children's views, feelings and voices. Those interested and concerned (children, parents, ECD workers, NGOs and others up to government, donors, researchers, and so on) need a better picture and sense of what 'effective' ECD programmes accomplish and achieve. This means that there is also a need to find examples of methods and tools used to monitor children and the nature and quality of their participation; and a need to work towards documenting the process of children's participation in creative ways.

A further critical point to raise, for broader debate, is the degree to which value is placed on children's views and reactions being captured and set alongside adult views to try to gain a fuller understanding of whether a project is 'effective' or not.

There are also questions about different rules and accepted ways for interacting with adults or children across cultures. What happens when real engagement by children conflicts with the views of those (who may be outsiders) who promote ECD projects? What about parental or community aspirations for children that conflict with what NGOs might believe 'best' or 'right'. Some parents press for teachers or ECD workers or teachers to teach children to read and write at a very early age. They want this because they are keen for their children to enter and succeed in primary school. They also are aware that there may be 'entrance' exams that will test these skills. Those of us who advocate for appropriate early childhood programmes – those that promote learning by doing, trying, exploring and playing – can find ourselves on opposite sides from parents and/or those who set primary entrance exams. But I would claim that there is growing evidence that formal and direct teaching for very young children can undermine their longer-term development and their confidence in themselves as learners.

> *"millions of children begin to work at early ages and therefore participate by bringing in income to households"*

Related to the broader discourse on children's participation – although perhaps separate – is the reality that millions of children begin to work at early ages and therefore participate by bringing in income to households. Many are also expected to take on certain household responsibilities: gathering water or firewood, caring for younger siblings, cooking and cleaning, taking care of animals, and so on.

I have seen three or four year olds 'in charge' of their smaller brothers and sisters, including having the smaller one slung on their hips. The point for me is that in many communities young children do participate – often actively – yet when it comes to finding out how they view their responsibilities (or involvement in ECD programmes) many of us think it is not possible.

India: children have a different outlook ...
photo: Jean-Luc Ray
© The Aga Khan Foundation

## ... and some ways forward

Part of the challenge in ECD is that we are dealing with children under eight years of age. We might still learn some lessons from the growing numbers of examples used with older children and adolescents: for example, in recent years there has been increased attention to hearing the views of school children – a necessary part of that real engagement I discussed earlier.

Child-to-Child programmes have pioneered an approach that promotes reflection on experiences, active participation, and decision making by children. There is a tremendous amount of documentation showing children really engaged as leaders and as doers in the fight for health education and promotion at home, in communities and in schools.

Another example can be found in *I dreamed I had a girl in my pocket*, a recent publication describing the work of Wendy Ewald, a photographer who brought instant cameras to India and worked with children over the course of months on photography.[1] She asked children to take pictures that meant something to them. The publication is remarkable. Pictures of friends, family members of all ages and themselves at work, play and rest, celebrating marriage (including their own), in conversation. It also has landscapes and animals and their homes. Since each photo has an explanation by the child who took the photo, the rationale for selection provides an insight into their thinking and perception of their world.

CHETNA's Child Resource Centre in India, provides further examples through their 'Children in Charge for Change' initiative.[2] This programme is documenting what different NGOs in India are already doing *vis-à-vis* children's participation, again in the sense of real engagement. CHETNA describes this as a 'child focused programme that builds on a realistic assessment of children's abilities and capacities, ensures participation of children in planning, implementing and evaluating programmes, emphasises a facilitating role for adults, deals with problems/issues in an inter-sectoral way and views the child in the context of his or her family and community.'

One enterprise that is documented in this initiative – Bal Sansad (Children's Parliaments) – is featured on page 37 of this edition of *Early Childhood Matters*.

The same source also reminds us that children's participation is dependent on adults' ability to provide opportunities and offers some suggestions for enabling participation:

- giving voice to children's feelings and concerns;
- children taking part in planning and implementation and assessment of programmes; and
- children taking decisions, according to their maturity and capacities.

This last point is highly pertinent for those of us in the field of ECD, since we work with infants, toddlers, preschoolers and those in lower primary school. Infants and very young toddlers and preschoolers are not able to describe their thoughts in 'adult-speak', although their emotional, physical and verbal reactions (giggles, cries, silent watching, rigid body/limbs, babbling, cooing, screaming) can be indicative, if not absolutely clear. When individual reactions repeat themselves in patterns, we have further clues.

Using photos and video cameras to record what happens could supplement and complement documentation and reports. In addition, methods such as Participatory Learning and Action (or Participatory Rapid Appraisals) may be useful to weave in children's views on their participation[1]. We can also compare what young children convey to us with what we learn from primary caregivers, family members (including siblings), ECD workers and others, about their observations and interactions with children. This helps to build a mosaic of perspectives on what children might experience in specific ECD programmes over time and across contexts.

*"When individual reactions repeat themselves in patterns, we have further clues."*

Looking back with children can also be useful. I had a conversation with a preschool trainer in Kenya where AKF supports both a community based preschool programme and a separate primary school improvement programme. The trainer shared that she had visited the children who had 'graduated' the previous year and were now in grade one of primary school to see whether and how many were enrolled. She asked the children what they thought of their new school. Some of the children said they were getting on well. Others expressed longing for their old preschool and teacher – who did not hit them, who let them choose activities and play, and so on. How seriously do we take such statements as children make one of the many transitions that can come along in life? In this case, the information from the children was not necessarily fed back to the primary school, although to some extent it was discussed with preschool teachers. In retrospect, I see such feedback as useful for programme changes – on both sides – if there can be fuller discussions amongst the project teams, teachers and parents.

We should keep in mind one of the underlying principles of ECD programming: that young children are intimately joined to and depend on those who live around them. Therefore, how children experience their own involvement in ECD programmes might, at least in part, be linked to how and how well their

India: *hey Mum, tell me what your scribbles mean*
photo: Jean-Luc Ray
© The Aga Khan Foundation

Portugal: *my puppet can tell you better than I can*
photo: Jean-Luc Ray
© The Aga Khan Foundation

main caregivers and family members are enabled and encouraged to participate in ECD programmes themselves. We will need to gain a better understanding of some of the dynamics involved here. But, if mothers and fathers feel involved, have opportunities to learn, develop and make decisions about their lives; and if sisters and brothers enjoy learning and know they can study as well as continue with their other economic or household responsibilities, what does this do for the infants and younger children in these homes and communities? Might it not change the way in which children experience whatever ECD effort is being implemented? If parents and siblings (or others) who care for them are supported, can a virtuous cycle be created – or is this unrealistic?

My hope is that by working with others involved in ECD work, it might be possible – over time – to develop, identify and fine-tune methods that illustrate and reflect a more holistic understanding of young children's participation in ECD programmes. It will be critical that these be diverse and flexible so that the various groups of individuals, with different experiential and educational background, might select and be able to use them. It will be useful to hear about work that is being done in this area and to begin to pull it together to share with others. For example, Save the Children (UK) has some interesting publications related to this area from its field experiences internationally. The Bernard van Leer Foundation, in collaboration with other members of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development's consortium of partners, is in the early stages of a three-year 'Effectiveness Initiative' which may provide an opportunity to identify what others are already doing.

While I do not have complete responses to some of the points I have raised, I am becoming more and more conscious of how easily children, particularly any hint of their voice and opinion, can slip out of focus when we discuss effectiveness in ECD. But if we lose those, then we restrict their real engagement. I believe we can do more, especially if we share what has or hasn't worked in different contexts. To end, here are a few of the benefits CHETNA offers to encourage us to give space to children and their participation:

1. It empowers children. The greatest benefit to children is that it builds capacities and confidence, enriches them and makes them more responsible.
2. It is a process of socialisation. Children learn that, just as they have a voice, so do others and that differing views demand the same respect for all.
3. It gives children a voice and the freedom to express themselves.

1. Ewald, W and the children of Vichva village. *I dreamed I had a girl in my pocket*. (1996) Umbra Editions Inc/Double Take Books: New York/Durham, North Carolina. *This project was organised under the auspices of the Self-Employed Women's Association* (SEWA) Ahmedabad, India.

2. Further information and materials on 'Children in Charge for Change' can be obtained from: CHETNA, The Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness: Lilavatiben Labhai's Bungalow, Civil camp Road, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad – 380 004 Gujarat, India. Excerpts taken from the pamphlet 'Children in Charge for Change': From Being to Becoming (1997).

3. For further information about how these methods have been adapted previously, see *the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development's Notebook* no 20, 1997. See also the International Institute for Environmental Development's RRA Notes series, published from London, England.

**AKF and the Bernard van Leer Foundation, amongst other donors, contributed to CHETNA's Children in Charge for Change project. AKF has also supported the Child-to-Child Trust and other Child-to-Child projects in South Asia and East Africa.**



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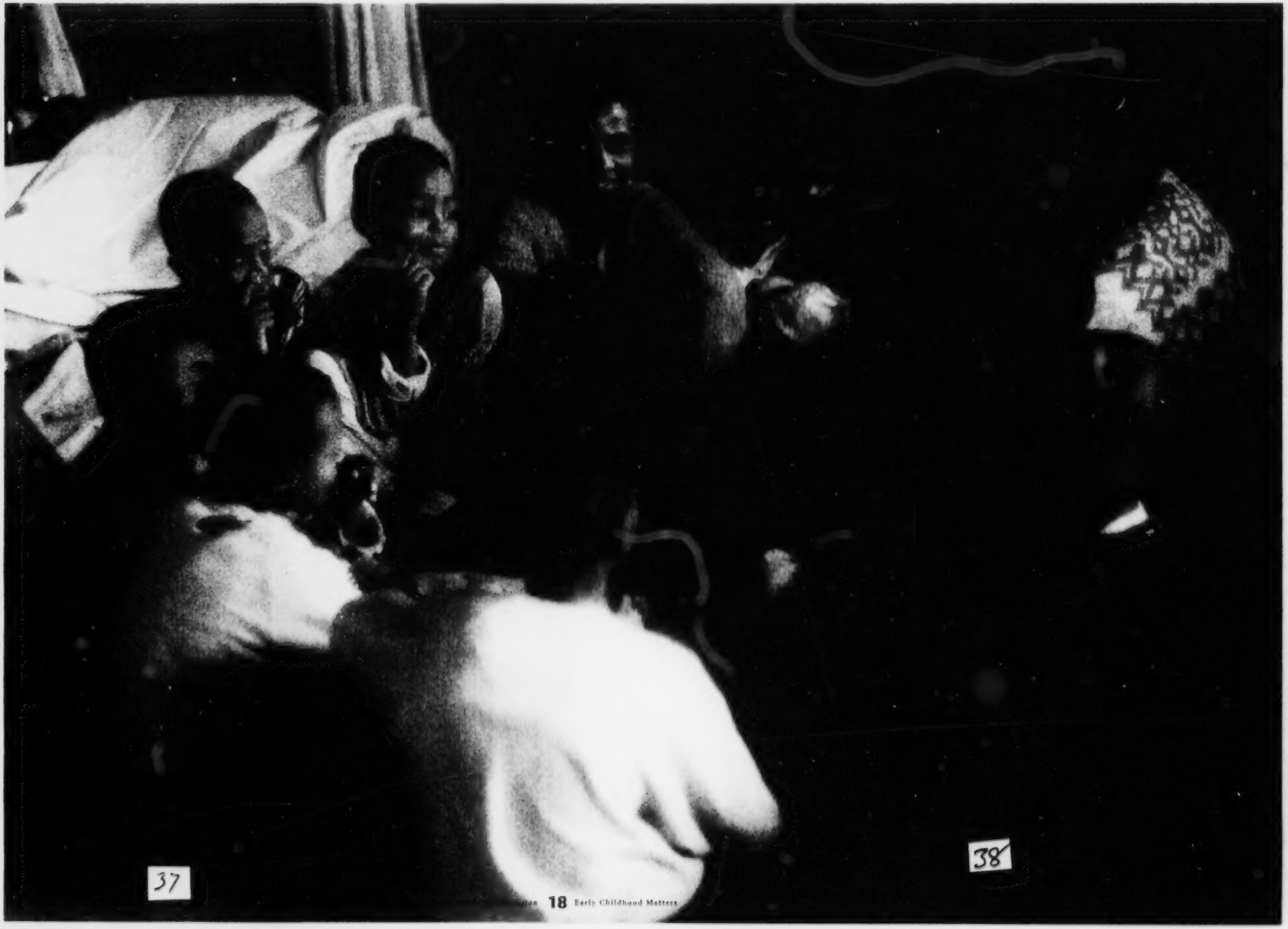




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# *Tapping a key resource*

David Tolfree is a freelance consultant with a particular interest in children in difficult circumstances.

Martin Woodhead is a developmental psychologist at the Open University, United Kingdom, and coordinator of the MA course in Child Development. His recent work has concentrated on cultural aspects of child development and children's rights.

In this article they argue for practitioners, researchers and policy makers in early childhood development (ECD) to listen to children. They then discuss processes of working with children that acknowledge the extraordinary capacity that children have for trying to make sense of their situation and find ways of dealing with it. For clarity, the article is set out in three sections: 'We should listen to children because ...'; 'How to do it' and 'Special factors'.

David Tolfree and Martin Woodhead

pie: group work with shoeshine boys
x Martin Woodhead

# *The boomerang of kindness*

With a group of children who were facing the dangers of attacks by Muslim and Croat forces in Banja Luca, Bosnia, the use of playful techniques freed the emotional expression of children – which itself helps to promote development and problem solving. It also seemed to unlock their capacity for very creative thinking and positive ideas. They came up with the 'Boomerang of kindness'. The idea was that throwing out a boomerang of kindness meant that kindness came back to them too.[1]

**We should listen to children because ...**

*... it helps their development*

Eliciting children's views is validating and empowering. It is important in itself for adults to reveal their ignorance to children and ask children what they think. Listening must not wait until children are able to join in adult conversations. It should begin at birth, and be adapted to their developing capacities for communication and participation in their social world.

*... we need to avoid assumptions*

Pre-conceptions about what children think, want and need in particular contexts; assumptions about features of childhood that are often assumed to be universal; and labelling children and then making broad assumptions about them, make us less effective.

*... what they experience may be different from what we intend or expect*

We can learn what their real preoccupations are rather than what adults think or hope they might be. In one country in Africa for example, we enabled a group of working children to compile a newsletter about the educational programme they were in. One recurring theme was physical punishment – something that none of the staff had mentioned to us.

*... they can change the ways in which we view ourselves as adults*

Recognising children's competencies and their ability to contribute, helps break down the boundaries between the worlds of adults and children. It helps adults to reflect on the limitations of their understandings of children's worlds. Children, like adults, are social actors trying to make sense of situations they find themselves in.

*... they have something to say*

In their own terms, children think deeply, are very sensitive and aware, and are concerned about what they are doing, why they are doing it and how to make sense of it. They also have considerable ability in articulating their ideas, concerns, opinions, beliefs and feelings – although this will depend on their age, their cultural context and their educational experiences.

*... they are valuable partners*

Children can be powerful social actors with something to offer to their wider families and communities. For example, because of armed conflict, many parents in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia became frozen emotionally and were depressed. That inhibited their ability to see what was happening in their children and respond to it. In workshops conducted by an organisation called Zdravo da Ste[2] to promote the development of refugee children living in centres in Serbia, the children could sometimes recover their capacity for emotional expression more quickly than could the adults. Some children could even be seen trying to draw their own parents into self-expression.

*... they can help us understand their unique perspectives*

There's no simple cause and effect relationship between certain types of events and certain types of behavioural or emotional reactions in children or adults. They're mediated through a whole range of different variables – the individual family, community, the wider context, cultural factors and so on. To understand the impact of particular circumstances, there is no substitute for finding out from individual children how each of them is reacting.



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Ethiopia, role play by childstreet vendors
photo: Martin Woodhead

*... they can help us shape policy and practice*
Children – the principal stakeholders – rarely get heard in policy debate or in discussions about what is best practice. This has been especially true in recent international actions to eliminate child labour: some of those involved seemed reluctant to include representatives of working children within their discussions. This can lead to ineffective or even harmful interventions.

*... they should be an important part of any evaluation study*
Evaluations generally measure children's behaviour, abilities and social adjustment but frequently bypass children's experience, ideas and opinions. For example, evaluating education according to an input-output model often involves judging the curriculum and teaching in terms of children's performance in tests and examinations. But it is important to include how children perceive the teaching and learning processes, and the dynamics of the relationships between teachers and pupils, and pupils and pupils.

## How to do it

Working with children is a creative process that occurs within a particular kind of setting, in a particular relationship and a particular context. It's not so much a matter of eliciting children's pre-formed ideas and opinions, it's much more a question of enabling them to explore the ways in which they perceive the world and communicate their ideas in ways that are meaningful for them.

*The setting*
A supposedly neutral setting may have different connotations for children according to their past experiences. Adults have to understand what these might be for children and take account of them. In general, children need to feel safe and reasonably comfortable in a setting that isn't too distracting.

*The relationship*
Children are trying to make sense of the adult who is asking them questions. They will be affected and may be inhibited according to how they understand the power relationships in the situation. They may put an adult in a certain category – parent, teacher, priest, employer, customer – and adapt what they say according to what they believe is safe. This means we may have to interpret what children say in the light of what we think they think about us. Very often, formal or informal research with children is done one-to-one, adult and child. But we have to ask 'What does it mean to children to have a one-to-one encounter with a stranger?' Although childcare workers will have closer relationships with children than researchers and policy makers, those relationships will still inhibit certain types of conversation.

*Communicating ...*
Children don't always readily express themselves in ways that adults might prefer or expect. For example, it may be very important to create settings and modes of communication that don't rely on language.

*... through drawing/mapping*
Drawings are widely used in participatory work with children, as are mapping techniques. Both can help children lead the adult through their daily lives. In Ethiopia, Bangladesh, The Philippines and Central America, we asked working children to draw the 'important people' in their lives as a starting point for talking about parents' expectations of children[1]. In the Former Republic of Yugoslavia, drawings were used as a means to help children communicate their feelings and understandings about violence, loss and separation. The drawings expressed what talking or listening conventionally might not have revealed.

*... through sorting and ranking games*
If children are asked directly to talk about their lives at home, at school, or at work, they may seem to have nothing to say, or offer an evasive reply such as 'All right' or 'OK'. Instead, we asked working children to sort and rank picture cards depicting themselves alongside other children, doing different kinds of

Bangladesh: a mapping exercise
Children's Day
Martin Woodhead collection

work. They had no difficulty making comparisons and articulating the relative cost-benefits of different children's lives. For another activity, we used cards of 'happy' and 'sad' faces to find out how children experienced life at school.

*... through drama, music and dance*

In Sweden[3] work with children from a refugee background included dance, drama and music in a kind of workshop setting. In Zimbabwe[4] we came across childcare workers using a traditional dance with children but adapting it to include references to particular issues they were grappling with, such as their experiences with conflict and their hope to return to a peaceful Mozambique.

*... through role-play*

Role-play about a situation can enable children to spontaneously express all sorts of things they might not consciously have thought about but can now express in ways that are acceptable to them. Issues emerge and, through discussion and interpretation, thoughts and feelings can be articulated.

*... through groupwork*

It can be much more effective to work with children in group situations rather than through individual conversations. Group work can provide a richer, more creative process of communication. In a sense the adult – by asking permission to join in a peer group encounter – is setting a context in which children feel at ease with each other. Groups also have the advantage that they give children a greater feeling of safety: they are less imposing/exposing than for children on their own. Finally, children in groups stimulate each other.

*... from child to child*

It's not just adults who can communicate with children. Some very interesting work is being done, especially by Save the Children UK[5]. They invited children to do research with children. Children know what the issues are from their point of view, and therefore know which are the most relevant. They can also elicit information from other children that adults can't. Particularly stunning is a piece of work that a group of children did into children leaving institutional care. Because the interviewers had also left care, there was a kind of empathy there that somehow unlocked greater honesty (or at least a very different perspective) than might have been created if adults had been asking the questions.

## Special factors

*Invisible children*

Difficult circumstances can impact on children's ability to communicate. Play, for example, can be inhibited, children become silent and unresponsive, they may be depressed or withdrawn, and may not even be seen in the public places that fieldworkers often take as the starting point for their studies. Communication with these invisible children is important, not just in finding out what they think and feel and so on, but also in helping them break out of the vicious circle of depression and, frequently, exclusion.

*The impact of cultural differences*

Different cultural 'currencies' of communication are important. In some countries children seemed to relate most easily to visual representations – drawings and picture games. In others, oral methods such as role-play, little dramas or discussions were better. There are often powerful cultural rules that shape what children feel comfortable about sharing, and with whom. In Sudan, for example, we found that people don't talk about personal and painful issues with anybody except those within their very closest circle of family and friends. There are also rules about expression of feelings. For example, it would be a source of huge embarrassment and shame to children if they cried in front of a stranger.

Such conventions vary within societies – notably according to children's age and gender – and they also change from one generation to another. It is also essential to be aware that different cultures have different languages of feelings.

*Reliability of approaches, processes and responses*
Successful approaches must ensure that children both feel safe to talk and actually are safe to talk. Encounters must be reflexive and dynamic with children and adult reacting to each other – it's not a question of the adult being a passive observer, asking the questions and writing down the answers. Adults must also be facilitators, self-consciously aware of how they are shaping the situation to help children to express themselves. Until all of this is working well, children tend to skew their responses to what they think adults want to hear.

*Informed consent/ethical issues*
It isn't sufficient merely to gain children's consent. What does it mean to obtain children's informed consent? In research, for example, what do they think they are consenting to? Do they understand how the information is going to be used – what, for example, do they assume about the information getting back to people who are in positions of power and authority?

We also have to consider their ability to understand the implications of giving that consent, the possible consequences of their participation, as well as the requirements for seeking the consent of adults (parents, teachers and so on). Clear conventions for carrying out research involving children apply within many countries but may vary between countries. There may also be other issues to bear in mind. For example, if children are living away from parents or in minority groups or conflict situations, parents may be suspicious of an outsider who wants to talk with their children.

It is also essential to have a clear policy and procedure for responding appropriately to children who disclose information that you feel you have a moral obligation to do something about. How do you determine where confidentiality has limits? And how can you deal with that without putting children into a more vulnerable position?

*Shedding power*
It is essential to shed some of the power and domination that you might expect to exert over children and to show that you regard what they say as important. It is also necessary to be willing to expose yourself to real expressions of pain and distress.

*Talk to children – it pays*
Our experience shows that the reason for talking to children is clear: all stakeholders gain. However, this is not something to be undertaken lightly and there are pitfalls. But there are already a number of well-proven ways of working with children in ways that are both fair to the children and rewarding to the listener. It takes time, it takes skill, it isn't easy. It's very frustrating when it doesn't work and very rewarding when it does.

1. See Tolfree D, *Restoring Playfulness* (1996) Radda Barnen, Stockholm, Sweden.

2. Tolfree D, as above.

3. See Woodhead M, *Children's Perspectives on their Working Lives: A Participatory Study in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, The Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua*, (1998) Radda Barnen, Stockholm, Sweden.

4. Tolfree D, as above.

5. 'Makwaya: dancing with hope' video, *Save the Children* (UK).

6. West A and others, *You're on your own: young people's research on leaving care* (1995) Save the Children (UK), London.

David Tolfree's publications include *Roof and Roots: The Care of Separated Children in the Developing World* (1995) Arena, Aldershot, England; *Residential Care for Children and Alternatives Approaches to Care in Developing Countries* (1995) *Save the Children*, London, England; *Restoring Playfulness* (1996) Radda Barnen, Stockholm, Sweden; and *Old Enough to Work, Old Enough to Have a Say* (1998) Radda Barnen, Stockholm, Sweden.

Martin Woodhead's publications on childhood issues include *In Search of the Rainbow: Pathways to Quality in Large-scale Programmes for Young Disadvantaged Children* (1996) Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Hague; *Children's Perspectives on their Working Lives: A Participatory Study in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, The Philippines, Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua* (1998) Radda Barnen, Stockholm, Sweden; and (as co-editor) *Cultural Worlds of Early Childhood* (1998) Routledge, London.



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# *Driving a car for the first time:*

## *teachers, caregivers and a child-driven approach*

*Drs Jorien Meerdink is a social historian who worked as a teacher and researcher and then, in 1989, founded the Wetenschappelijke Educatieve en Sociaal-Kulturele Projekten (WESP – Scientific, Educational and Socio-cultural Research). She is Project Manager of the Foundation-supported Young Children's Views project that is investigating ways of training teachers and others to find out about young children's opinions and views through interviews based on open questions. The project has developed training materials and a syllabus that provides a methodology, and is now working on a manual that will provide a theoretical basis for this sort of work.*

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Portugal – [illegible]
photo: Jean-Luc Ray
The Aga Khan Foundation

### Effectiveness according to children

Usually it is adults who decide what is best for children, as they research effectiveness, and as they provide care, education, and special projects. In our child-driven methodology and, more specifically, in our project 'Young Children's Views', we try to let children judge. We argue in favour of a shift in emphasis: 'effectiveness **according** to children' instead of 'effectiveness **for** children'.

There are many assumptions about, and prejudices against, using children as a source of information about their own situation; and there are many arguments against interviewing them. Often heard are:

- that children, especially young children, can't express themselves;
- that their life experience is too limited for them to be aware of alternatives and judge their situation; and
- that they are unable to have differentiated opinions, are too self-centred, and live in a world of magic and fantasy.

The result is that adults tend to have one-way communications with children: teaching them things instead of learning from them; and testing and checking their own hypotheses. Also, they use their own agenda and interests. One caregiver stated: 'I don't ask about what the child wants to say, but about what **I** want to hear'.

In the early nineties, childcare institutions in The Netherlands decided that they wanted to work in a client-centred way. To do this, they needed to let 'demand' be judged by children themselves. Various questionnaires for children about their satisfaction were in fact developed, but were never systematically used. WESP therefore developed and implemented a child-driven methodology in cooperation with a large number of children and some childcare facilities. It involved asking children of eight years and older open questions about their opinions and experiences, training caregivers and teachers (the 'suppliers') to perform such interviews, and using the acquired information to improve the 'product'. The rationale for using caregivers as interviewers – which proved to be right – is that they would feel more committed to the outcomes. A side effect (if not the main effect), was that the interview experience made them better listeners in their daily communication with children.

The value of the interviews based on open questions was soon revealed: it turned out that children are splendid informants, if taken seriously. They even express clearly defined 'quality criteria' that are often the opposite of what adults think that children find important. This shows that thinking **for** children can be a serious threat to understanding them fully.

Other effects occurred on three levels: the quality of care became more child-centred and anticipated children's needs; the quality of institutions improved in terms of environment, rules, client participation and so on; and the workers themselves took children more seriously, listened to them, kept their promises, gave them more time, and so on.

### Young Children's Views

An ambitious project called Young Children's Views is now underway in a small town in The Netherlands. It is coordinated by the town council and the aim is to help disadvantaged children and/or children at risk, by bringing schools and care institutions together, and improving their communication and networks.

The Netherlands. My house.
Anne.

Included in this work is the creation of a tool, a 'listening method', through which the voices of children aged four to eight can be heard, and problem situations spotted and prevented. This is being developed by WESP. The project consists of:

- carrying out a literature study on what is known about verbal communication with children;
- developing a prototype tool for interviewing four to eight year old children about their school experiences;
- developing a child oriented interview training;
- training four teachers and caregivers;
- interviewing 25 young school children, about half of whom belong to the target group;
- reporting on what children liked and did not like, as well as on the agenda and interests of children; and
- developing a listening model for use in education.

The project is ambitious in the sense that there is hardly any existing expertise on interviewing young children. Another challenge is developing a system that makes the best use of the information given by the child, and transmitting that information from school to caregivers and *vice versa*.

We are currently in the middle of the interview training, and many conclusions can already be drawn. One interesting one is that children are very, very cooperative during the interviews and actually help the insecure trainees!



That first car drive

After reading the syllabus and the questionnaire, the trainees found themselves in an awkward position. They had to think about all this new information – which included leading questions, closed and open questions, questions from the agenda and interests of the child – while simultaneously using the tape recorder, **and** the questionnaire, **and** trying to cope with tools that were obtrusive because they were being used for the first time. The normal had become abnormal, so of course they reacted. Trainees said:

> *If I had to ask the way to the railway station, I wouldn't know how.*

> *I don't want to lose my natural way of speaking with children because of this training.*

Analysing their first interview they were still indignant. They found it confrontational to interview a child without knowing anything about that child beforehand while using a questionnaire made by someone else, and being required to pursue what the child has said, rather than what they wanted to know.

> *I realised that I had to empty myself of all prior knowledge in order to make a new way of listening possible. It felt terrible.*

All trainees concluded that it is hard to ask open questions and avoid 'helping' or 'leading' questions. Facts are easier to ask about than feelings but elicit much less information: children may tell complete stories in response to a question such as 'How did it feel?'.

They also concluded that they are clearly diffident about asking questions on the home situation or other difficult matters. This is not because children aren't open on the subject or aren't willing to talk about emotions. If interviewers take the initiative, children give as many 'keys' to their private situations as to their school ones. Instead, it is because the trainees themselves feel impertinent and blocked; they don't know what to do with the information and are afraid to burden the child too much. So, although the questionnaire contains as many questions about the home situation as about the 'safer' school one, interviewers hardly asked about parents or problems at home in their first interviews.

After the second interview the trainees decided to put away the questionnaire and let themselves be guided by the children. Making real contact turned out to be the best basis for acquiring information. Meanwhile, however, the trainees were so busy with themselves that they had a hard time paying attention to, or even looking at, the child. One trainee (a very experienced communications trainer), felt that he couldn't really get in touch with the children because he felt trapped in the constraints of having to do a technically good interview and to behave as required:

*Perhaps there is something lacking in my communication with children in general. I have lost that sense of wonder that I feel when I see nature. Perhaps if I can regain that feeling with a child, then I can start making real contact again.*

He and the trainer agreed that one of the preconditions for that is to put out of his head, not only the formal interview questionnaire, but also all the other implicit agendas he has when talking with children. These agendas range from a diagnosis of learning problems to advice about these.

The Netherlands: *you adults made this table too high for us*

Two trainees had been rather overwhelmed by the child's desire to play. They participated actively in the games but then couldn't make the switch back to the interview. One of them discovered that playing a memory game with realistic photo cards produced quite a few stories on the shown subjects. Another interviewer had 'panicked' when the child asked him to play a game, and had answered that he didn't like games. The child accepted this, gave him a small role in drawing a picture, played mostly by himself and, in the meantime, gave the interviewer a lot of information. The group concluded that children can talk usefully, even while they are playing.

Compared to the caregivers, the teachers had particular difficulties because they initially found it hard to participate in the uncertain process of learning by experience. This was because they were used to standardised learning programmes, and to determining pupil's starting levels before commencing lessons. At first they said:

*You should have checked what we already knew and could do, instead of putting everything up for discussion and making us feel that we knew nothing.*

But after the second interview, they were already concluding that it was refreshing to have no prior information about the children:

*Otherwise I could not have questioned him in such an unprejudiced way.*

*I now realise that I'm usually inclined to listen to what I think I hear. It's good letting go of my own terms of reference and, for example, openly asking the child's opinion on the matter rather than simply checking whether I'm right or explaining my conclusions.*

### Interviewing in a school situation

The interview experiences made it clear that it is hard to interview children at school. There is hardly any suitable space – either the principal or teachers have to move – or there is too much noise and too many distractions. There is also the problem of time. In a school for special education for children at risk, the (only) teacher would have had to give the entire school time off in order to be able to conduct an interview during school time. This was solved by allowing her to conduct interviews after school hours.

There are other differences between interviewing children in a school setting and doing so in a formal care setting. Parents are willing to cooperate and children are unlikely to refuse in care settings so there is a higher refusal rate in schools.

Another is that teachers are less used to having one-to-one conversations with children than caregivers are, and also find it harder to ask questions about difficult subjects, specifically those relating to parents and the situation at home. Also, teachers tend to be satisfied with the first answer a child gives and then

move on to another subject instead of probing deeper. Yet a child's first answer will very often be just the beginning of a whole story.

Finally, teachers concluded that they tend to teach while interviewing: they check whether the children have learned anything from what they have just talked about, rather than checking whether they, the interviewers, have understood completely. We will be continuing with our analysis of interview attitudes and techniques.

### The reactions

All the children reacted positively to the interviews. They found them interesting, liked the individual attention, and felt they had something to say. As a reward for their cooperation, they could choose a small present from a basket and these were appreciated. The interviewers were surprised and happy that the children were able to sit and talk for such a long time (varying from 20 minutes to over an hour). They concluded that:

> *Perhaps we underestimate children; perhaps we are too focused on what is problematic and negative.*

The children gave a lot of information in response to open questions about how they experience their environment. They gave consistent information and realistic and differentiated judgements on their schoolmates or teachers. As they talked, fantasy and magic may have featured too but these did not prevent us hearing about the realities of their lives.

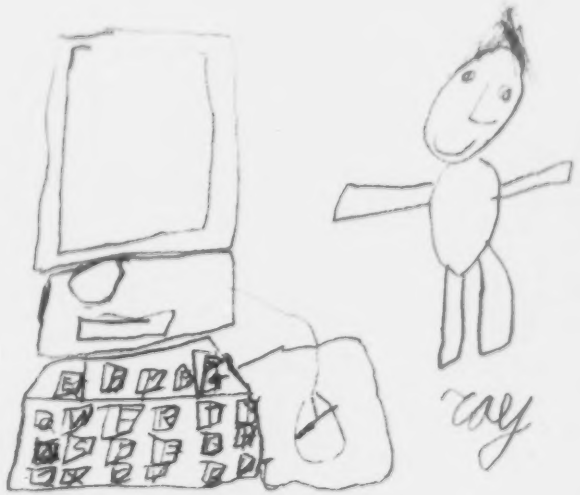
### What children said to us

The trainees we worked with often overestimated the importance of teachers in children's environments: the most important people in the lives of children in schools are actually their peers. In the training we asked them what question they would ask a child who had both a male and a female teacher, and who said 'The last time I had fun in the classroom was when I played a fun game with Martin.' (Martin was the child's friend). The trainees came up with:

> *What game was that?*
>
> *What was fun about it?*
>
> *Was this when your male or your female teacher was teaching?*

The key word that the trainer wanted to hear was 'Martin' but the trainees couldn't produce this. Peers are important both in a positive and a negative way. Children often get most of their support from other children; not from caregivers, teachers or parents. At the same time, however, they often need to be protected from their classmates by their teachers. It turned out that being bullied is the number one cause of emotions that all children express in the interviews. It is the subject they talk about most, and most emotionally.

It is too early to draw any general conclusions at this stage of the project and it is hard to say whether interviews can be a suitable listening mechanism within the current structure and organisation of education. What can already definitely be concluded, however, is that the possibilities and need for working in a child-driven way are obvious, and that the interview is an interesting technique to consider as part of common and daily communication.




The Netherlands: *computers are this simple*
Roy

# *Peru:*

## Children's Parliaments – hearing children

Grimaldo Ríos Barrientos

Peru: activities with children that are high energy and packed full of activities
photo: Gerry Salole

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Overall, the project is about enhancing resilience in children and Children's Parliaments are key instruments for us. This is because our resilience work focuses on a cluster of human abilities or characteristics. These are: the ability to express feelings; independence; self-awareness/self-criticism; optimism and a sense of humour; and a willingness to cooperate with others. Children's Parliaments can strengthen each of these; and they are especially useful in ensuring that children understand and subscribe to the notion of cooperation.

### Why listen to children?

There are two adult views about child development and about the place of childhood in society. One view says that it is adults who must devise the social policies and family actions that will preserve children's best interests. The second view is that only adults can or should make resources available to support children. Both claim that children are the future but their views actually militate against this. A general vision emerges from these two views: an adult domination that is justified by claiming that children are too young to have valid opinions and ideas. To some extent, this accounts for breakdowns in communication and understanding between generations – 'Who can understand children?' And it can also account for the breakdown of programmes for children.

We take a different approach: we help children to think and speak for themselves; we listen to them; and we respond to what they express. Through this approach, children can make their needs, wishes and hopes known to the people who make the decisions. We call this 'child protagonism'. It means that the adults who are responsible for a project no longer decide for children, and then make them adapt to it – something that may seem faster and more convenient but that isn't ethical and, in the end, isn't useful either.

This is why we have launched the idea of Children's Parliaments (see box on page 34) and are working to improve it. At first we were interested in ensuring that the programmes that we were devising for children were appropriate for them. We had already been running the resilience project for some time, so we started by trying to find out what they thought about all aspects of what they had experienced so far. We also asked them what they thought should be included in a new programme.

In the first Children's Parliaments, we couldn't generate proper participation by the children about the core interest of the project: how to promote resilience. We realised that this was because we were continuing to operate as specialists – as the adults who know best – and that this did not allow the children to develop and express informed opinions. We therefore took a very different line in subsequent Children's Parliaments, involving children in self-diagnostic processes that enabled them to explore, reflect on and offer their views on the situations they experience. They concentrated on three areas: things that made them sad – their hurts and problems; things that made them happy – their joys; and the things that they wanted in the future – their hopes.

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## What we learned

First, it is very obvious that, given the right processes, children are very capable of understanding and working with the self-diagnostic approach. They used it on their material situations, on chaos or uncertainty in their lives, on their prospects and, in one community, on abuse.

In terms of our original objectives, the Children's Parliaments taught us the aspirations that children had for the project. They wanted a happy project; they wanted to learn how to make music so they could dance; and they wanted a recreational space. They also wanted better facilities, more like those enjoyed by children in Lima, the capital city of Peru.

The biggest shock for us was that they wanted to change some of the animators. The children found them too hard and very serious: they didn't make the children happy. Also, they didn't always fulfil their promises, sometimes came late, and sometimes didn't come at all. Some would only play with their own children or with the children nearest to them. The children also told us that they weren't happy with our organising team so we had to change that too.

"

*The biggest shock for us was that they wanted to change some of the animators.*

"



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# *Enabling young children to participate*

# *Children's Parliaments the Andean way*

We also learned that the children wanted to participate in decision making about the project's activities, about the workshops on art and cultural identity, and about the equipping of the Play Houses.

All of this shows what changes might be necessary when the wishes of children guide programmes. I would go further and claim that, beyond this purely practical level, it is only when children help to shape a project that its viability can be guaranteed.

### Children taking responsibility

Even more interesting and important is children's dedication to participating in the realisation of their hopes. Through the processes I've talked about, the children assumed a level of responsibility for the evolution of the project. They said:

> *This is what we believe, this is what we need and want, and this is what we can and will contribute to make it successful.*

In other words, they didn't just make demands. They didn't exhibit a culture of dependence such as you might expect in a country that is in the process of development, especially one that has just experienced terrorism, or policies that have used up so much of the energies of the population. I believe that this also shows that processes of





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participation like this have a profound internal effect on children: they accept responsibility for ensuring success in the ideas that they put forward. Now and in the future, this is directly beneficial to their communities.

They also show responsibility elsewhere – for example, for the future of their families:

> *I am sad because we are very poor, but I'm happy because my cow has just given birth. Now, to help make sure that we don't stay poor, I must take care of the calves. (Alfredo, aged seven)*

However, I also want to say that, as we gain more experience, we are refining all of our thinking. We started out with the idea that it was important to enable children to actually speak for themselves, and that we needed to prepare them – train them, even – to do so. The ways in which everything has developed have been almost accidental: whatever arose was considered and, if it seemed to be necessary, became a fundamental part of the project. Now the most important new area to work on is analysing what we are hearing, finding out how to gauge its significance; and determining what kind of strategic analysis is possible. From that we have to determine how to refine the ways in which children can take responsibility for bringing about change.

making her case for taking action
photo: Gerry Salole



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### Putting the results to work

We have used the information gathered so far to determine that the project should be happier, and should use participative and child-like approaches. We have also used it to redefine our approaches to working with the issues that children identify: we take a positive line. That means not talking in terms of burdens and effort but in terms of strengthening, of opportunities and of the future. Instead of threats, we talk about fears and about hopes.

The results so far show us that it was realistic to aim at enabling children to decide what they needed, and to argue and work for it. We see that they carry out analyses in four settings: in their families; in their communities; in their schools; and internally as individuals. But we also see that they have yet to move beyond this to become automatic or natural protagonists. That's what we are now working hard on.

### The place of the Children's Parliaments in the project

We make the link that children who can speak to their own needs are resilient children. They also become a different sort of citizen. The next step – and it's a big one – could be for them to become child leaders. Children want to speak for themselves, and many of them also want to be leaders in wider society in later life – leaders of their communities, presidents of associations, mayors of towns, and so on.

But again, I have to say that we don't claim to know everything: we are trying out something here, looking for ways forward. The promotion of resilience in children is new to us and nothing existed for us to work with: we are inventing and testing it.

### Impact on stakeholders

Parents can see that these kinds of activities change children ... and if children are changed, their families are also changed. Children who can speak for themselves will have different roles in their families, and this changes the ways in which families develop – for example, instead of the parents having a position of authority over the child, they recognise that children are contributing to the development of the family. Such children also generate new resources or put new life into existing ones – like parents for example! We help parents understand the importance of play and what children express through it. Once they understand, parents become resources by joining children, supporting them, responding to them and helping them make things happen. And don't forget that, just by playing, children also make the family environment a happier place.

Teachers said:

> *This project helps us and it helps the children make better progress.*

> *The children in my class come top in all the regional tests, thanks to this.*

A pupil said:

> *But what would happen if all the other children had this too? Then we wouldn't win everything!*

### Conclusions

Children's Parliaments can serve as a vehicle of intergenerational communication that can start the processes of healing family divisions. More than this, they help the development of civic consciousness in children and, at an early age, introduce them to abilities such as investigation, analysis, and participation in democratic processes.

# *India:*
# *Bal Sansad - Children's Parliaments*

**Children in Charge for Change is a Foundation-supported project initiated by the non-governmental organisation Centre for Health Education, Training and Nutrition Awareness (CHETNA – which also means 'awareness' in several Indian languages). Via this project, CHETNA aims to equip and enable children to participate fully and responsibly, not only in development activities, but also in decision making.**

t Children's Parliament in session – attended by members of the local community
he *Children in Charge for Change Resource Package*

**This article is drawn from a Resource Package put together by Children in Charge for Change.[1] It focuses on the Bal Sansad (Children's Parliaments) that have been developed by the Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC), Tilonia, Rajasthan. Rajasthan is a semi-arid state in northwestern India. It is one of the country's largest and poorest states, in which over 80 percent of women and 45 percent of men are illiterate. More than half of school age children do not attend school and the majority of these are girls.**

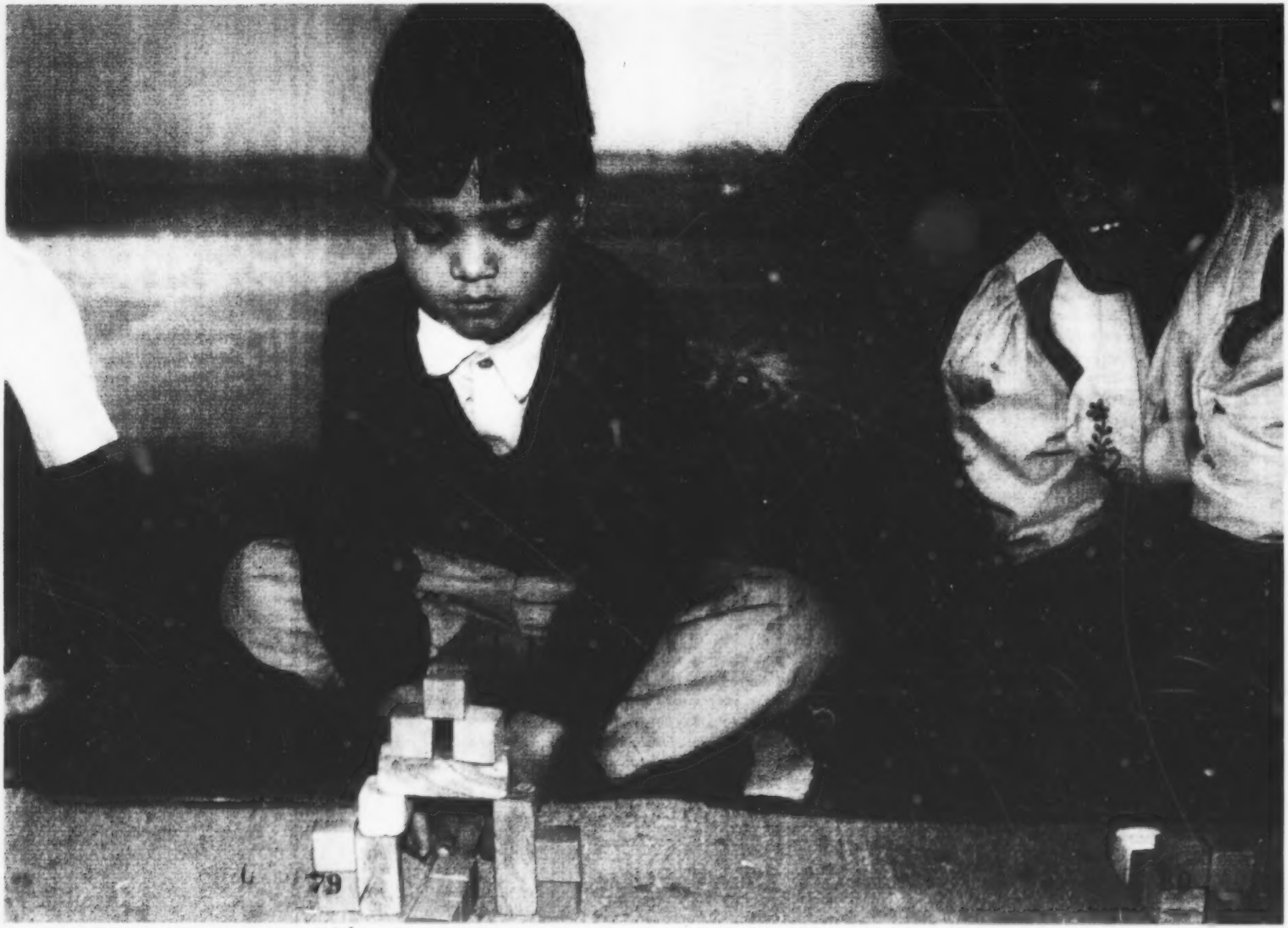
**SWRC is a voluntary organisation, established during the 1970s to work with local village communities in an integrated development process. This covers community development, education for both adults and children, water and sanitation, the preservation of the environment, health, agriculture and effective utilisation of energy. The Bal Sansad are for children aged six to 14 years of age. The youngest children gain experience in democratic processes that are directly linked to their lives and needs; and they develop confidence and skills in participation. This is in preparation for the more formal roles they become eligible for later.**

The Bal Sansad were devised with the aim of orienting village children about the political system and at the same time enabling them to participate in matters pertaining directly to their lives, mainly in the field of education. Creating opportunities for children to understand and communicate their needs, and learn about both their rights as equal society members as well as the responsibilities that ensue, prepares them to face the challenges of adulthood as conscious, active citizens. It also presents an opportunity to recognise development priorities thereby putting children in the centre of the development agenda, and linking them to concerns on a wider scale.

Conceptualised in 1991, the programme actually acquired its present shape in 1993 when the first Bal Sansad was elected. However, it is important to understand that this happened following a long process of changing the nature of village schools. Visualising participation as a primary aim, a different system was evolved for schools, based on the philosophy that everyone has something to contribute in teaching as well as the capacity to learn. The traditional environment in which the student is dependent on the teacher was abandoned for one based on mutual communication and interaction.

The objectives of the Bal Sansad were inspired by great value and respect for children's opinions and capabilities. This innovative concept provides students with the opportunity to actively participate in the running of their schools through a democratic process that is above gender, caste, creed or economic situation. This unique exercise helps root education in the local context and builds appropriate and relevant life

India: Children's Parliaments are part of an integrated development programme that includes preschools
photo: Liane Gertsch





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skills, teaches children about politics and the electoral process within their own world, retains the interest of the students and enhances their curiosity to learn and to question.

### The election process

The electorate for the Parliament constitutes about 1,750 students between 6 to 14 years of age. Elections to the Bal Sansad and [Legislative Assemblies] take place simultaneously. One Member of Parliament (MP) is elected for every 100-125 children, while each Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) represents 30 to 35 children.

SWRC functionaries adopt the role of the bureaucracy within the Children's Parliament to impart training about how policies are formulated, how the electoral process actually works and the importance for citizens to exercise the critical right to vote.

There are ministers and the portfolios defined for each of them are similar to those of the various units of SWRC: Education; Finance; Home; Industries; Energy; Communications; Environment; Women's Development; Water Resources; etc. The person in charge of each section/unit at the organisational level serves as secretary to the corresponding minister. These linkages facilitate coordination between the Bal Sansad and SWRC and enable the children to understand how the organisation operates. The members of the elected government also act as a critical link between SWRC and the community.

The parliament consists of two parties: Ujala, which means Light with a tree as a logo and Gauval, which means Shepherd, with an elephant as a logo. Names and logos are decided by the children themselves. The candidates opt to be in either party and are then given nomination forms. Time is then given to each party to canvass for its candidates. The election notices are issued by the Election Commissioner.

Once the campaign period ends, the dates for casting of votes are fixed. Ballot papers are printed for the secret ballot system. The SWRC office at Tilonia becomes the central point for the final count of votes. Party representatives are present during the counting process. If any candidate feels dissatisfied with the procedure or has any complaints, s/he has the right to file a written complaint with the Election Commissioner. The party attaining the largest number of elected candidates is invited to form the government. It is not uncommon to observe a winner in the elections pacifying a loser. Contesting on behalf of different parties does not create a rift between children, a common occurrence among adults.

### Parliamentary procedures

The parliament holds monthly sessions at different field centres, open for anyone to attend, to review its work and make future plans. If the opposition party finds that the efforts of the majority party are not satisfactory in any area, the issue is raised for discussion. The Prime Minister is accountable to all MPs, who have the right to question her/his decisions. The decisions taken or the issues raised are recorded by the secretaries of the different ministers, the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader. As a rule, the secretaries must attend all the monthly sessions. If they are irregular in attendance, they could be fined by the MPs. Strict action is also taken against ministers who do not attend the sessions.

A booklet – *Code of conduct and Duties and Responsibilities of Ministers* – guides the work of the ministers. They are expected to talk to the parents of rural working children who are not currently attending night school and convince them of the importance and significance of education and specifically, sending their children to school. They also take attendance every day in the schools, of both children and teachers, and visit four night schools every month. Post-visit discussions are held to answer questions about the teachers, facilities, number of students, etc. Children with more responsibility raise issues such as the installation of hand pumps, construction of school walls and replacement of teachers.

Elected representatives are now expected to attend the meetings of the village committees and their activities, are informed and report on the facilities, especially with regard to health and drinking water, within their village. They have also launched their own magazine – Gwa – which is circulated to all the night schools to keep the children informed of their rights and various local events.

In addition, regular correspondence is maintained between the ministers, members of the Bal Sansad and other children, as it would be strenuous and inconvenient to travel between villages on a daily basis. This communication creates awareness among the children about important issues.

### Suitable outcomes

One outcome is a widening in children's spheres of interest. It was realised that because the Bal Sansad emerged from the night schools of SWRC, the children's interests and questions tended to remain within the confines of their immediate environment – that is, their school. To enable children to be empowered, it is necessary that they move beyond this limit and relate not only to the overall work of the organisation, but to every aspect of village life. Thus members are now being encouraged to ask questions which relate to their lives.

A second set of outcomes is about the Bal Sansad having direct impact. For example, Leela Devi, Minister for Energy, was unhappy when a liquor shop opened en route to her all-girl school in Purohitan ki Dhani village. The mothers became uncomfortable sending their daughters to school and the regular attendance of 60 girls dropped drastically. The students held a meeting in the village and convinced the village head to have the shop moved outside the village.

For political reasons, the school in another village was closed. Notwithstanding the inaccessibility of the building, the children continued to hold classes outside the locked doors, on the roadside. When the matter was brought to the attention of the Bal Sansad, it was decided to hold the monthly meeting in this particular village and invite the political representative of the local self government committee, a district board member and the man after whom the village was named, to attend. The district board member promised the children that the school would be reopened and that if it were closed again, he would arrange for the construction of a new building. Not completely satisfied, the children met with the Assistant District Collector, who sent a team to investigate, and the District Commissioner, who promised that she would take the necessary action to prevent the school from being closed. The school remains open.

There are also instances of the Bal Sansad changing attitudes. For example in cases where parents hinder their child's participation in Bal Sansad activities, a mediation team comprising children from both the parties and SWRC members attempt to convince the parents. If they still do not agree, then new elections are held. However, it needs special mention that many traditional and orthodox people of this area of Rajasthan have allowed their daughters to go to the schools and contest elections which are generally considered to be priority areas for boys or men.

### Conclusion

An environment of actual parliamentary proceedings is created through which the child is able to experience firsthand the results of true awareness in a democratic process as well as the merits and consequences of responsibility. Through this environment the child is able to draw a link to the adult world and understand and relate to it, maybe for the first time in her/his life, from her/his own perspective. On this level of learning, the child's viewpoint is connected to the larger perspective; and this process irrevocably broadens thought, increases expectations, generates curiosity and creates a feeling of fearlessness among the children. In turn they develop confidence and independence of thought to fervently question; to articulate their views, thoughts, feelings, opinions and desires; and to take decisions.

Overall, there is still a great deal more to be accomplished, which will be possible due to the awareness of the project staff and the fact that they do not turn a blind eye to any innovations suggested by the children or the community and are constantly making efforts to make improvements.

# The Bernard van Leer Foundation's 50th anniversary

Oscar van Leer, shaper of the Foundation and ...

... Bernard van Leer, the Founder

The Bernard van Leer Foundation celebrates its 50th anniversary in November of this year. It was founded in 1949 by Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist who, in 1919, established an industrial and consumer packaging company that was to become Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer NV. This is currently a limited company operating in over 40 countries worldwide.

During his lifetime Bernard van Leer supported a broad range of humanitarian causes. In 1949, he created the Bernard van Leer Foundation, to channel the revenues from his fortune to charitable purposes after his death.

When he died in 1958, the Foundation became the beneficiary of the entire share capital of the then privately owned Van Leer enterprise and other assets. Under the leadership of his son Oscar van Leer (1914-1996), the Foundation then started to focus on enhancing opportunities for children and young people who were growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage, to optimally develop their innate potential.

For the past 20 years, the Foundation has been concentrating only on children from 0-7 years of age. This is because research findings have demonstrated that interventions in the early years of childhood are most effective in yielding lasting benefits to children and society.

The Foundation accomplishes its objective through two interconnected strategies. The first is an international grant making programme in selected countries aimed at developing contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood care and development. Over 130 major early childhood projects are supported at any one time and these cover a broad range:

- some are in developing countries, others in industrialised countries;
- they may be situated in urban slums, shanty towns or
- remote rural areas;
- they may focus on children living in violent settings, children of ethnic and cultural minorities, children of single or teenage parents, or children of refugees and migrants;
- some seek to improve quality in daycare centres, preschools, health and other services;
- some may develop community-based services;
- some may seek to improve the quality of home environments by working with parents and other family members and caregivers.

Spain: learning about real life
Pre-escolar na Casa Project
Entry for the 1998 Poster Competition

The second strategy is sharing the accumulating wealth of knowledge and know-how that is generated by the projects that the Foundation supports, with the aim of informing and influencing policy and practice. This knowledge and know-how is disseminated via publications and videos to policy and decision makers; practitioners; trainers; and academics. The Foundation also encourages the projects that it supports to produce their own publications and videos for their principal audiences.

Through its two strategies, the Foundation endeavours to create better development opportunities for the greatest number of disadvantaged children possible, by achieving a wider impact in the domain of early childhood development than would be possible through grant-making alone.

To celebrate its 50th anniversary, the Foundation will organise a programme of special events, the highlight of which will be a celebration in The Peace Palace, The Hague on the 10th November 1999. This will be followed by a small international conference for practitioners and policy makers that will focus on what makes early childhood development programmes effective.

A leaflet giving fuller details of the Foundation and its grant-making policy is available, as is a Publications and Videos List. Please contact the Department of Programme Documentation and Communication, at the address given inside the front cover.

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Brazil: baby and mother, both roles played by once
Projeto Auto-estima das crianças negras
Fundação da Criança e do Adolescente





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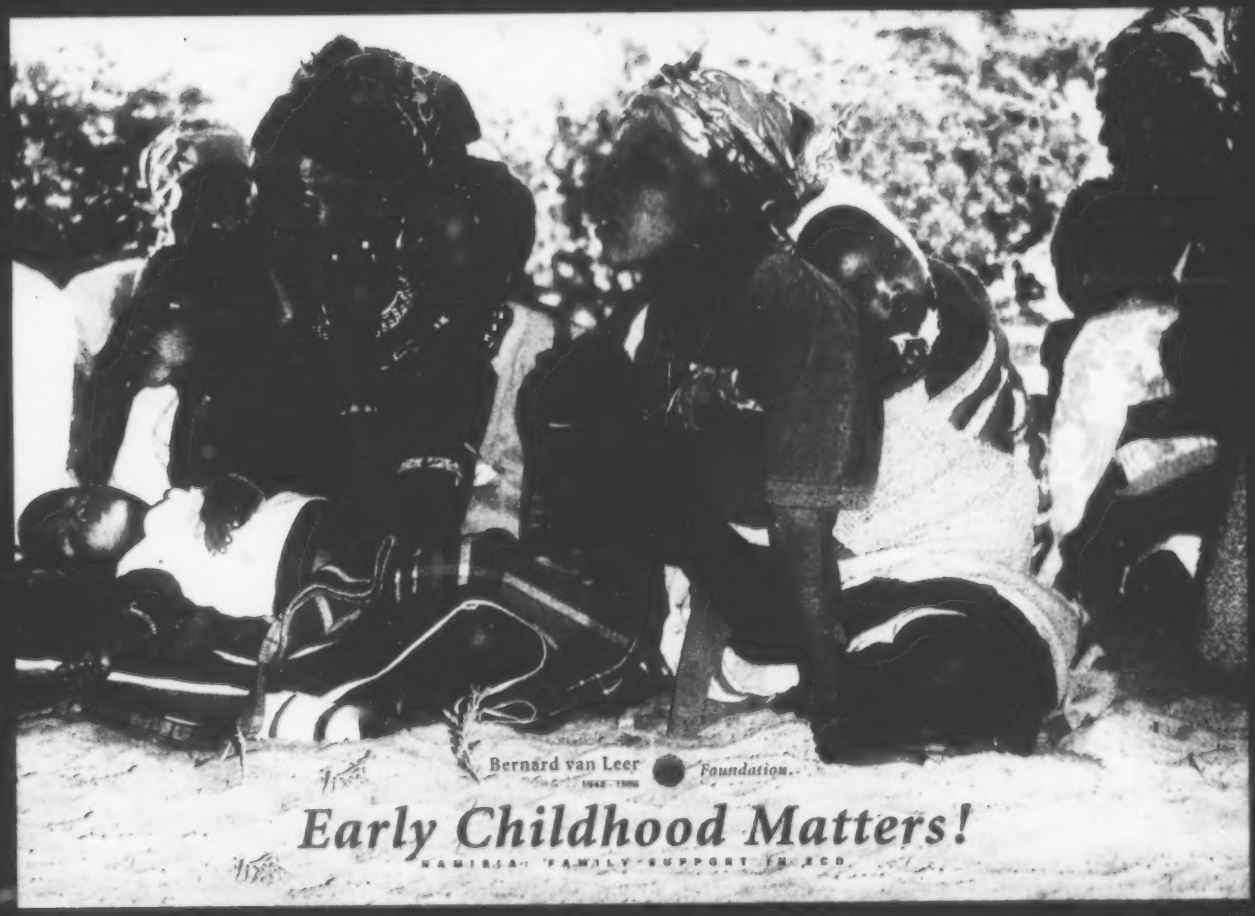
# Winner of the 1998 Poster Competition




Over [illegible] the Poster Competition produced an excellent collection of high quality photographs and drawings, many of which offered fantastic insights into the world of early childhood. Many thanks to all of you who took the trouble to send in entries. We have included seven in this calendar and had to stretch to fourteen more than we originally planned [illegible] calendar of [illegible] and another Foundation publication.

Copies of the [illegible] are available free from the Foundation.





PO Box 82334, 2508 EH The Hague, The Netherlands Tel +31 (0)70 351 2040, Fax +31 (0)70 350 2373, email registry@bvleerf.nl, website www.bernardvanleer.org

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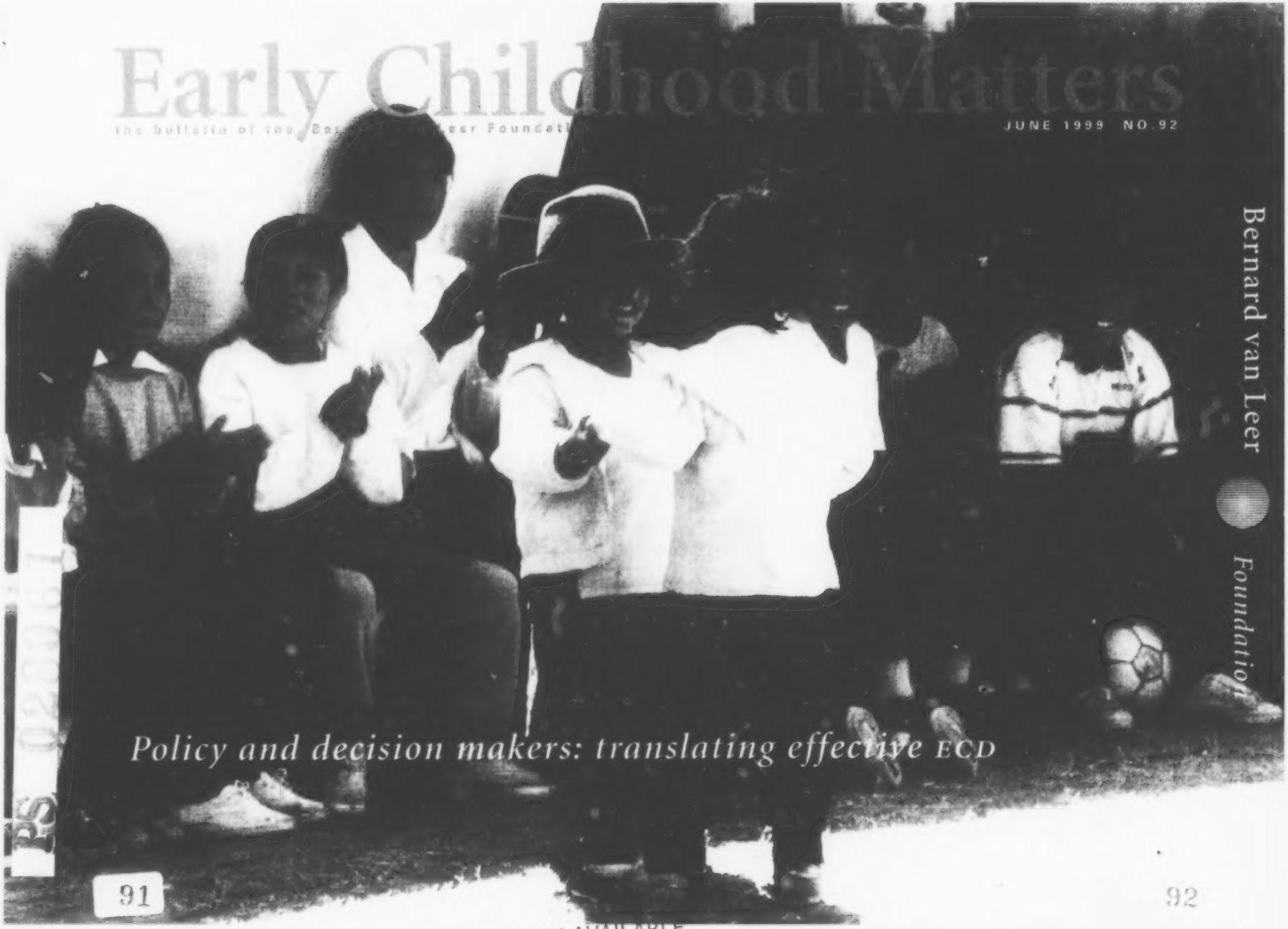
# Early Childhood Matters

the bulletin of the Bernard van Leer Foundation

JUNE 1999 NO.92



Bernard van Leer Foundation

*Policy and decision makers: translating effective ECD*



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**Bernard van Leer Foundation**
PO Box 82334, 2508 EH
The Hague, The Netherlands
Tel: +31 (0)70 351 2040
Fax: +31 (0)70 350 2373
email: registry@bvleerf.nl
www.bernardvanleer.org

**Editor**: Jim Smale
**Editorial Advisors**: Liesbeth Zwitser and Gerry Salole
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**Cover**: Peru. *Let's dance*
**photo**: Gerry Salole

**Inside front cover**: India. *The joy of reading*
Stichting Filosofie en Meditatie Literacy Project
**photo**: Liena Gertsch

**Back cover**: South Africa: *Everyone can make pictures*
Kwandebele project
**photo**: Learning for All Trust

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# *Policy and decision makers: translating effective* ECD

It's a rest day in the village. A small girl is busy learning to draw with a stick in the earth. She got the idea from her older brother who happened to be playing a simple mathematical game with his friend at the time. Soon her brother will teach her the game because he has learned to help her learn. Meanwhile, the girl is making patterns, sometimes carefully controlled, sometimes scribbled so quickly that the dirt flies. When she has finished, she might show her work to her mother or father, knowing they will discuss it with her, praise her, encourage her. Her parents are proud of her and they know she is doing well. For example, they know she is the right height and weight for her age in this community, and that she has had all her inoculations: there's a chart on the wall of their house that they update regularly with the village health worker.

Today, her father is working with the girl's grandmother to complete some teaching materials that the local preschool teacher has asked them to make. These are about the memories the grandmother has of the old ways of gathering and preparing food, of treating common illnesses, of singing, dancing and celebrating, of filtering water. On Monday, the grandmother will lead the children out from the preschool that community members helped to build, through the village and into the surrounding countryside, bringing these traditions back to life – for the children and for herself.

In two years or so, the girl will move on to the primary school a few kilometres away. She'll be confident in who she is and what she can do in that new environment. And she will do well, often in ways that, a few years ago, her new teacher would have found hard to categorise or cope with.

Some time in the future, perhaps as she starts to take on some village responsibilities, she will learn that the environment in which she grew was influenced powerfully by remote policy and decision makers – those who, for better or worse, try to positively affect local economies, health and education provision, the supply of essential resources, the ability of people to provide the best for their children.

And she may be surprised to find out how long the list is. It includes people from national, regional and local governments and their agencies; non-governmental organisations; international financial institutions; international donors and grantmakers; and national and international lobbying groups. She'll recognise then that, on balance, the influences on her early childhood were positive, not least because those remote policy and decision makers were effective in what they set out to do. This edition of *Early Childhood Matters* shows how such people and their agencies – at international, governmental, regional and country levels – attempt to be effective, to have a positive influence on the lives of young children.

Zimbabwe: *Many hands make light work*
Centre for Development Information & Education
photo: Paula Nimpuno-Parente

### Supporting families

Supporting families is one of the single most effective starting points for helping children enjoy the best possible start to their lives. Such support may include providing parents with the information they need; ensuring that the support they need is available; helping them gain the necessary skills; or improving the economic status of their family. It may be on a wide scale – for example, the support that governments can give by marshalling, refocusing, supplementing and delivering the considerable resources that they control.

The first article considers the approach of the Irish government to providing that broad support. It established an independent Commission on the Family that spent a total of three years consulting, investigating, collecting and analysing information and ideas, and then devising practical ways of deploying existing and new resources effectively. As it did this, it took account of what kinds of interventions had proved particularly effective. Notable here was its endorsement of the Community Mothers programme in which Family Development Nurses employed by the Regional Health Boards train experienced mothers to voluntarily support first time mothers. The Commission delivered its report – *Strengthening Families for Life*[1] – in the context of a new Programme for Government that was committed to a 'families first' approach in developing policies and services. The Commission's recommendations included: broadening the remit of the Department of Social Welfare to include new responsibilities in family policy and services; the establishment of a Family Affairs Unit and the investment of carefully placed sums of new money. (page 6)

### Effective investments

Supporting ECD costs money and that may invite the question 'Is it only developed countries that can afford ECD?' One answer is provided by the World Bank. Its endorsement of ECD programmes is based on a recognition of the importance of the early years not just for individuals – especially the poorest – but for the direct economic benefit and future financial health of whole countries. As the article on page 12 shows, investments in the health and nutritional status of young children, and in their cognitive development, have multiple benefits. They range from a direct reduction in the number of children who suffer from ill health, to enjoying more productive lives as adults, to improving society by, for example, reducing crime rates.[2]

Many donor and support organisations have been involved in making ECD affordable by supporting the development of a huge range of highly effective, low cost approaches. They also look beyond providing direct technical support. An 'Informal information exchange' day organised by the Academy for Educational Development in November 1998, provided an opportunity for major players to compare notes about maximising their effectiveness. The article on page 18 shows that each has a range of carefully focused strategies while, overall, there is considerable diversity. It includes: identifying key objectives at particular stages of child development; social marketing campaigns; interventions to



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break the cycle of poverty; improving monitoring and evaluation; supporting qualitative research; bridging the gap between the academic world and advocates; and supporting integrated development programmes.[3]

The article by Mirza Jahani, the regional representative of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) in East Africa, shows why AKF supports a move away from stand-alone ECD programmes towards integrated development programmes. It is the one of the effective ways of guaranteeing the viability of the community in these remote and impoverished areas. His model also goes beyond development in individual communities. It includes the development of mutually supportive networks of communities that help to generate and circulate the wealth that can be used to pay for many necessities – including ECD programmes. Beyond this, the network can also serve as the basis for establishing or reinforcing grassroots structures through which regional and central government support can be lobbied for and channelled. (page 27)

The following article from Southern Africa offers Mokhethi Moshoeshoe's own reflections on what it takes to build strong partnerships between the grantmakers and the grantees. He links these to the experiences of the Southern African Grantmakers Association as it developed its *Guidelines for good practice*. As he stresses, the point is to bring grantmakers and grantees into close and effective partnership. Few people are better qualified to discuss this: Mokhethi Moshoeshoe has worked both in grantee organisations as well as on the grantmaking side. He is well aware of the practical difficulties that can arise, even when each side is of equal good will, and is committed to producing the same results for the same reasons in the same ways. (page 34)

The final article looks back over ten years of building on what was there, developing policies and making decisions in Cambodia. Once Redd Barna was able to establish a country office in 1988, it was able to start laying the foundations for long term sustainable development. The article indicates some of the difficulties in coming to the right strategic decisions in a particularly challenging context, and stresses the need to be willing to learn. Policies and programmes have not remained static: they have evolved and developed to meet changing needs that are drawn from changing realities. (page 38)

### Conclusions

This collection offers a spread of experiences from which many lessons emerge. For example, it shows the importance of maximising the potential of what is there – whether that is the synergy that can be developed between service providers, or the untapped talents of parents. It also shows that early childhood initiatives serve as excellent entry points to communities; and that they can also be excellent starting points for wider programmes: there is a motivation and commitment that can be built on. For example, parents – acknowledged and respected as first educators – are committed to enhancing the well-being of their children; and communities know that they must build towards a better future through each new generation. The challenge for remote policy and decision makers is – as Mirza Jahani puts it – to be a strong link in a chain that stretches through to that little girl scribbling busily in the earth. Effectively, that means building strong partnerships with organisations who have, or can develop, close and productive relationships with the communities – partnerships that are built on trust, openness, realism, learning from each other and mutual respect.

### The next edition

As part of the development of *Early Childhood Matters* I am very pleased to welcome a guest editor for the October 1999 edition: Ellen Ilfield. The edition will include a first report on the Foundation's 'Effectiveness Initiative', a major undertaking in collaboration with other key players, that will delve deep into 11 projects in 11 different countries to try to discover what has contributed to – or detracted from – their effectiveness.

*Jim Smale* Editor

notes

1. See page 6.
2. See page 12.
3. See page 18.

# *Ireland: strengthening families for life*

*Catherine Hazlett*

*Catherine Hazlett was Secretary to the Irish Government appointed independent Commission on the Family from 1995 to 1998. She is now a Principal Officer with responsibility for the newly established Family Affairs Unit in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs of the Irish Government in Dublin.*

*This article highlights the work of the Commission on the Family that the Irish government entrusted with the task of producing a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the issues affecting families in Ireland; and with making wide-ranging recommendations across several different policy areas. The point is to make a positive contribution to developing coherent, progressive and effective policies for families. The article is a celebration of processes of consultation and reflection that goes on to review some of the first results of implementation. It also includes boxes about two successful Foundation-supported projects. These illustrate effective work to benefit young children, their families and their communities: the Community Mothers Programme; and the Togher Family Centre.*

*The article is based on a presentation made at 'Supporting Families – A Consultation Conference' that was organised by the Family Policy Studies Centre in London in January 1999.*

*Strengthening Families for Life – the report of the Commission on the Family*, published by the Irish Government in July 1998, is the outcome of a three year in-depth analysis of the situation of families in Ireland as we approach the new century. The work was undertaken by the Commission on the Family, an independent commission of family experts, established to recommend to the Government how families could be strengthened in carrying out their caring and nurturing roles for children in a rapidly changing social and economic environment.

The Commission's work was completed in the context of a new Programme for Government committed to a 'families first' approach to the development of policies and services. This included:

- a broadening of the remit of the Irish Government's Department of Social Welfare to include new responsibilities in family policy and services;
- the establishment of a Family Affairs Unit in the Department to coordinate family poljcy; and
- new investment for the development of a range of family services and support initiatives.

**Family concerns – what families and others had to say**

Early on, the Commission adopted an open and inclusive approach to carrying out its task. The objective was to encourage participation by all those who had an interest in families and the challenges they are facing today. The Commission received some 540 submissions from individuals, and families; from national organisations that work with families and children; and from voluntary and community groups. Leading experts in the fields of family law, the Constitution, childcare and services for children, employment and workplace policies, parenting and healthcare also offered their advice and expertise.

Contributors wanted to promote family life and family well-being, and tackle the problems that families encounter while trying to carry out their functions. Children, their education, physical and emotional health and well-being, and the financial circumstances of their families were priorities. This was coupled with support for parents in providing for their families, in parenting and in meeting their childcare needs. The most prominent themes included:

*Education* – equipping young people for life; partnership with parents in educating children; the effects of educational disadvantage on children from poorer families.
*Childcare* – optimally developing children, particularly those in families with low incomes.
*Child income payments* – improving income support payments for families with children depending on social welfare.
*Family in society* – focusing on children, especially those living in poverty or with disabilities, and improving their health and well-being as societies change.
*The role of the state* – supporting families; funding services adequately; ensuring access to services for all; and putting in place the framework for the well-being of families and society.
*The media* – supporting values important to families such as stability and dependence on each other.

### Family policy – a focus on support

The Commission concludes that policy needs to focus on supportive measures to strengthen families in carrying out their functions and prevent difficulties arising for them; and sets out its views on the policy approaches that therefore should be pursued. As it does so, it makes wide ranging recommendations across several different policy areas.

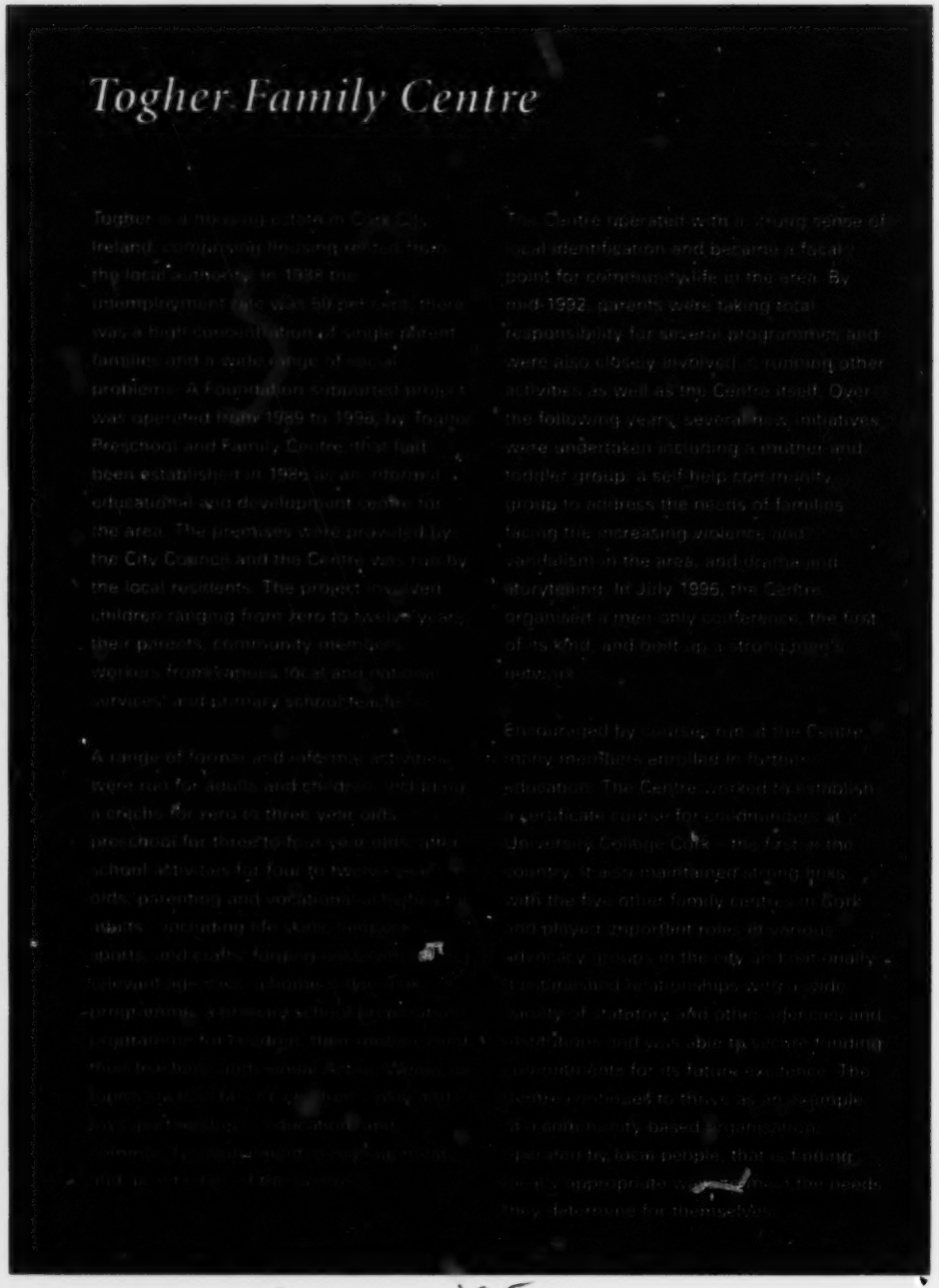
*Family well-being.* Affirming parents as the primary carers of their children, the Commission sets out a number of essential principles that are fundamental to the development of a coherent, progressive and effective family policy. These are that:

- the family unit is a fundamental unit providing stability and well-being in our society;
- the unique and essential family function is that of caring and nurturing for all its members;
- continuity and stability are major requirements in family relationships – especially for children;
- equality of well-being between individual family members should be recognised;
- family membership confers rights, duties and responsibilities;
- a diversity of family forms and relationships should be recognised.

*A strong institutional framework for family policy.* The Commission seeks a radical new approach to the coordination of family policy and the delivery of family services built on these principles. Crucial to success is a strong institutional framework within which the State's response to families can be developed and delivered. Recommendations include:

- singling out family well-being as a matter of critical importance in the Government programme and in the Houses of the Oireachtas (the Irish Parliament); and
- the adoption by Government of a Family Impact Statement which would set out clearly the consequences of policies, programmes and services for families in all major fields of Government activity, central and local.

## *Togher Family Centre*



*Prioritising the most vulnerable families and their children.* Within a policy approach that is empowering and builds on family and community strengths, the Commission makes a series of recommendations prioritising the needs of families who are trying to do the best they can for their children in difficult circumstances. These include:

- the development, with State support, of a nationwide network of Family and Community Resource Centres. The target is 100 centres over the next 4 to 5 years. The centres have their origins in community-based initiatives (see box). To this is coupled the transformation of local offices of the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs into local 'one-stop shops' that provide a gateway to a range of services for families.
- Greater investment in family support work at a preventive level, including: the introduction in all areas of Family Support Workers to assist families who are experiencing difficulty in caring for children from toddlers to teens at times of crisis or stress; and the extension of the Community Mothers concept (see box on page 11).
- Consistent support for families when a problem arises with a child's development, including better information and a single contact point with professional services.
- Close cooperative links between all local agencies, health boards, other state agencies and community-based services, in pursuit of shared family and community objectives.
- Exploring the potential of school settings for the delivery of health and social services to children and their families.

*Preschool and primary school children.* The Commission recommends a substantial investment package for preschool and primary school children, including:

- an Early Years Opportunities Subsidy for three year olds, to be used in a wide range of high quality preschool settings. This is coupled to financial support for parents caring for their own children in their own home.



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- A child-centred approach to the exploration of early years education issues.
- The development of quality standards in services for children, more support for community-based childcare and for childcare services for children with special needs.
- Further support for parents about parenting and family living through an accessible programme of parenting information.
- A recognition of a wide range of qualifications in relation to early years services to provide more choice for parents and increase opportunities for people to take up work with children.
- Greater investment in primary level education.

*Educating young people for life.* The report stresses the importance of the education system in preparing young people for family life and for parenthood, recommending a radical approach to the introduction of family life education throughout the school curriculum. The Commission also prioritises extra resources for the day to day running costs of schools in disadvantaged communities; action to improve the educational facilities for children with disabilities; and action to help Traveller children to stay in education and to complete second-level studies.

*Lone and teenaged parents.* The Commission recognised the importance of supporting lone parents' participation in the workforce. It recommends increased access to education and training; one to one advice and assistance in finding a placement in training, education or a job; and help in arranging childcare. For teenaged parents it recommended a comprehensive policy response, involving:

- prioritising support services for teenage mothers; and more initiatives to keep them in school.
- Encouraging young people to defer parenthood by improving life choices through training and education, and by offering young women realistic hopes of success in education and in securing employment.
- Providing information to young people to influence their behaviour and their future choices.
- Strengthening and expanding the role of youth services.
- Providing greater resources for social, personal and health education programmes to reach young people who are out of school, including programmes for young men about sexuality and parenthood.

*Promoting continuity and stability in family life.* The Commission recommends that policy objectives should recognise the value of stability and continuity in family relationships, especially for children. 'Income support policies should contain no unnecessary obstacles to children having the advantages of the stability and security of a loving family. Also, family incentives to marry or to form long-term, stable relationships need more prominence. Joint parenting should be encouraged; and there should be better and more effective education and preparation for relationships, marriage and family life. Resources should also be invested in marriage and relationship counselling services to support marriage, provide family mediation and guarantee continuing parenting relationships for children.

### Making progress

The Family Affairs Unit of the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs started operations in July 1998. It has responsibility for pursuing the findings in the report of the Commission on the Family, following their consideration by the Government. The functions of the Unit also include coordinating family policy in cooperation with other Departments of State, undertaking research and promoting awareness about family issues. The Unit also has responsibility for the development of a number of family services and considerable extra resources have been allocated by the Government for the development of these services. Key developments include:

- a major programme of support for the provision of marriage counselling and child counselling. Several innovative programmes are being funded which provide bereavement support to children on the loss of a parent through death or through marital separation.

- The framework for a nationwide Family Mediation Service is now in place. The service is free and available to all couples who have decided to separate.
- This year, some 50 Family and Community Resource Centres throughout the country will be funded.
- A Families Research Programme has been launched to support independent research into family issues.

A parenting information programme is planned for later this year and a pilot programme to provide a local family information service through 'one-stop shops' is being developed.

The Unit has a series of family fora currently underway throughout the country, where voluntary and community groups get the opportunity to discuss the new services, and issues and concerns that they encounter in their work in support of families, with the Government Minister and with senior officials. The outcome of these discussions is proving to be of valuable assistance in identifying priorities for family support developments.

Initiatives are underway in relation to early education and a White Paper (a statement of future government policy) is promised, addressing issues such as curriculum, catering for disadvantage, essential structures, and qualifications for teachers and childcare assistants. This will draw on the experiences and ideas that emerged from a specially convened National Forum on Early Education. The Forum took the form of multi-lateral discussions between representatives of major agencies involved in early childhood education. Investment in primary level education and in measures to tackle educational disadvantage has also been increased; while progress has been made in relation to the introduction of parental leave and investment in childcare projects in disadvantaged communities. A Working Group established to consider a strategy for childcare is expected to report in the middle of this year. This follows on from the publication in January 1999 of a report of an Expert Working Group on Childcare under Partnership 2000 – a national agreement between Government and Social Partners. Work is underway on the development of a Children Strategy and extra resources have been allocated to family support services.

## Conclusion

The report of the Commission on the Family sets out an ambitious agenda for policy makers and those who deliver family services. The publication of the report was widely welcomed by Government, social partners and family interests. Key priorities in the Government's pro-families programme cover areas highlighted by the Commission. The Commission's approach to some issues, as might be expected, continues to give rise to further analysis and discussion. This is a welcome development. In the words of the Chairman of the Commission, 'it would be presumptuous to assume that this report, though labelled 'final', is anything but a beginning …'

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# *Community Mothers*

The first Community Mothers programme in Ireland started in 1989 with Foundation support. It was operated by the Eastern Health Board in Dublin in partnership with the University of Bristol, England and concentrated on an area of Greater Dublin in which families had been rehoused from inner city slums to new housing estates on the outskirts of the city, resulting in isolation of young families from wider family and friends. Many of the families were single parents, many of the mothers were still in their teens. Existing health services found great difficulty in reaching these parents but were alarmed by poor and accumulating home environments, the poor health of children, their poor nutritional states and their poor school performance. The programme targeted infants and their parents, and the overall objectives were to establish and implement a home visiting programme to first time mothers in their homes, and institutionalise the programme in the community.

The programme retrained health nurses as Family Development Nurses (FDNs) to reorient them from routine medically oriented short home visits to much longer monthly visits in which nurse and parent became partners in their efforts to benefit the child. From 1993 the programme focused on the training of mothers from local communities, by specially recruited and trained FDNs, to be Community Mothers to new mothers. The Community Mothers made home visits monthly during the first 12 months of the child's life, using cartoon sequences to explain aspects of child development. Mother and toddler groups were also set up as were breastfeeding groups and parenting courses. Complementing these were antenatal packs aimed at pregnant teenagers and a regular newsletter for the Community Mothers – a forum for exchange of experiences, views and ideas among visited and visiting mothers.

During the 1990s the Community Mothers approach spread to other Health Boards across Ireland and as a programme to benefit the very young children of families in disadvantaged areas, has proved extremely successful. Its methods, evolved over a number of years, ensured a peer to peer approach that was more appropriate and more acceptable to the target families than a medically oriented professional approach. The women who became Community Mothers gained many personal rewards in self confidence, skills and experience and, in time, came to select new Community Mothers from amongst recruits from mothers who had been visited themselves. They trained and encouraged them and took delight in further training

opportunities and in mastering new activities such as assertiveness and relaxation. Peer (mother and mother and toddler) groups

Effects on children and on their mothers reported were known to the Child development unit and Foundation. Research showed that the beneficiaries of the Community Mothers programme were significantly advantaged compared with controls on certain parameters such as immunisation, nutrition of baby, child and mother developmental stimulation, and mothers self esteem and morale.

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# *Bolivia:*
## *costs and benefits*

*Jacques van der Gaag and Jee-Peng Tan*

*Professor Dr Jacques van der Gaag was Chief Economist in the Human Development Network of the World Bank, and is now Dean of the Faculty of Economic Science and Econometrics at the University of Amsterdam. Dr Jee-Peng Tan is Principal Human Resources Economist in the Education Department of the Human Development Network of the World Bank.*

*This article is taken from* The benefits of ECD programmes: an economic analysis, *published by the World Bank. It deals with an analysis of the Projecto Integral de Desarrollo Infantil (PIDI – Integrated Project of Early Childhood Development) in Bolivia that was designed to determine the likely economic benefits that could be expected by investing in this kind of early childhood development programme. Copies of* The benefits of ECD programmes: an economic analysis *are available from the World Bank, 1818 H Street NW, Washington DC 20433, USA. It is also available on the World Bank website: www.worldbank.org.*

### The PIDI Programme

The PIDI early childhood development programme consists of non-formal, home-based daycare centres where children receive nutrition, health and cognitive development services. Each centre serves 15 children, ranging from six months to six years of age. There is one mother/caretaker, who is assisted by one or two helpers, depending on the number of children under two in the PIDI. Children receive food that provides 70 percent of their calorie requirements, and basic healthcare. They are immunised, weighed and measured; and go through a daily programme of games and age-specific exercises to stimulate their cognitive development.

They are from very poor households in peri-urban areas, many being recent migrants from rural areas. Social conditions are characterised by high levels of malnutrition, infant and child mortality and disease, and by stunted psycho-social development. Primary school enrolment is very low. Repetition rates and drop-out rates are high. There is virtually no progression to higher levels of education.

The programme's objectives are:

1. to improve children's readiness to succeed in school and beyond by facilitating their physical, emotional, social and cognitive development;
2. to enhance the status of women by increasing their employment opportunities, and to expand their knowledge of health, education, and nutrition; and
3. to increase community and private sector participation in the social development process.

### Direct benefits from service delivery

ECD programmes provide a number of services that directly benefit the

enrolled child and her family. They include: meals and healthcare, and childcare services. Additional direct benefits may include training the mothers (for example on a child's nutritional needs), which may be valued by these mothers for its own sake.

In general, it is not difficult to measure the value of the direct benefits. The value of the food benefit can be estimated as its market value. If healthcare services are provided, the cost of these services in, say, a clinic can provide an estimate of its value to the recipient. In the same way all other services that are provided directly to the child or her mother or parents can be included in the analysis.[1]

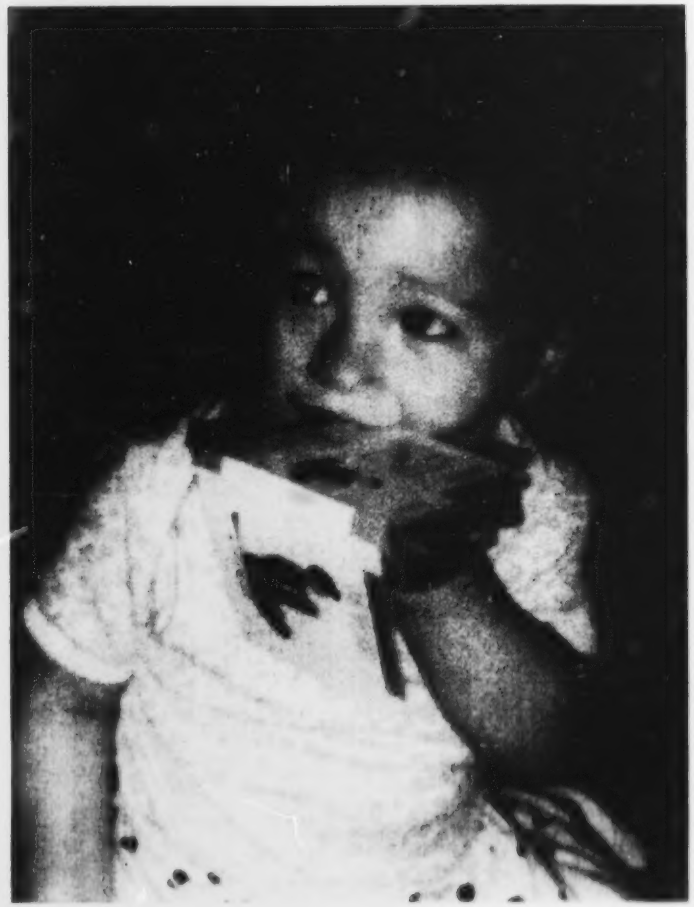
If we restrict ourselves to the value of the two meals per day that PIDI children receive, the direct benefits would amount to USD 150 (about half of total service delivery costs[2]). Alternatively, we could use the total recurrent costs of the programme[3] as a proxy for the service delivery benefits to the children and their families. This would put the direct service delivery benefits at about USD 300 per child per year.

## Preparing the base-line data for the productivity analysis

This part of the analysis involves the benefits in the form of increased productivity resulting from more education. Therefore, we first need to characterise the Bolivian education system. There are four levels of formal education in Bolivia, from primary schooling to higher education, each of which requires a number of years to complete, and each year has a unit cost. For performance indicators we chose enrolment and repetition rates by level of schooling. Our data show that Bolivia has a long way to go before the education of the population reaches levels sufficient to compete successfully in an increasingly knowledge-based and competitive global economy.

Using data from a 1993 integrated household survey covering a representative sample of urban households, we estimated a wage equation that related differences in (the logarithm of) wages, to differences in education levels and years of experience. Our results imply that someone who completed primary education earns 42 percent more

*Food for thought*
photo: World Bank



Colombia: *One child is all children*
Fe y Alegria project
photo: Alejandro José Lima Fals



(is 42 percent more productive) than someone without schooling. Since primary school has five grades, this amounts to a modest 8 percent increase in wages per year of education. We also find that a college graduate earns on average 2.76 times as much as an unschooled wage-earner. The estimation results on experience imply that wages peak after about 35 years of experience.

Armed with this information, we can now quantify the benefits of ECD programmes that are manifested in increased productivity.

### The impact of the PIDI Programme on social development

The first programme effect we look at is increased survival. Once a child is born she will grow up to become a productive member of society. The level of her productivity will depend on her physical and cognitive development during the early years of life, as well as on the investment in basic and higher education, and on subsequent investments in human capital, through continued learning and experience.

If the child dies prematurely, her future productivity, whatever its level, is lost for society. Preliminary results from the PIDI Programme suggest that the mortality of those enrolled is extremely low, less than one percent. This contrasts with the high child mortality rate – about 20 percent – of the target population in the absence of the ECD intervention. Once children are enrolled in a safe environment where life-threatening diseases (diarrhoea, severe malnutrition) are recognised and treated in time, children six months old or older have virtually a 100 percent chance to survive past the age of five.

Reliable information on changes in the nutritional status of enrolled children is not yet available. Possible changes in chronic malnutrition (stunting) may not be evident for years (they may not occur until the children reach puberty). Estimates on the programme's effect on acute malnutrition (wasting) also await future evaluation efforts.

Forty percent of children who initially enrol in the PIDI Programme show stunted psycho-social development.

After one year in the programme this percentage is reduced to 20 percent. After two years it is cut to five percent.[4] If this result of tremendous progress in psycho-social development holds up under further scrutiny, it bodes well for the future chances of successfully educating PIDI graduates.

Before we can translate these results into monetary benefits, using the standard economics of education approach explained in *The benefits of ECD programmes: an economic analysis*, we need to translate these effects on nutritional status and cognitive development into expected changes in enrolment, drop out rates, repetition rates, and progression to higher levels of education. We are fortunate to have direct observations of changes in primary enrolment, but we have to turn to the literature (or to data on the general population) to obtain estimates for improvements in school performance.

Though the PIDI Programme is still young, the limited information available suggests that virtually all children who leave the programme at the age of six enrol in primary school, up from 20 percent in the absence of the programme. Part of this large increase is probably the direct result of the improvements in the children's health and nutrition levels. Part, no doubt, also stems from parents' greater awareness of the benefits of education – a result of the parents' active participation in the programme.

Given favourable outcomes on nutrition and school preparedness (or psycho-social development), one would expect improvements in school performance, which are reflected in reduced drop-out and repetition rates and increased progression to higher levels of education. Due to lack of more detailed information, we will assume that PIDI graduates, once they are enrolled in primary school, will perform at the same level as the national average.

We worked with the relevant social indicators of two target groups, with and without the PIDI Programme (Scenario One and Scenario Two). Scenario One can be thought of as the result of a very narrow targeting effort that reaches the most deprived segments of society. Scenario Two represents a part of society which already enjoys modestly favourable social indicators. The effects of the ECD intervention are therefore less dramatic than in the first scenario. We assume that the infant mortality rate and the primary enrolment rate can be improved to the national averages while progression to higher levels of schooling improves modestly. Results from both scenarios will give us a range for the cost-benefit ratios. We also assume that drop-out and repetition rates in primary school will be reduced by 50 percent.

### The US Dollar value of increased productivity

We first estimate the net present value (NPV) of the education system as it currently functions for the target group (20 percent primary enrolment, 35 percent drop-out, 10 percent repetition, and no progression to higher levels of education). The 20 percent of children who do enrol have a higher level of productivity during their active lifetime than they would have had without this education. We use the age-earnings function to estimate this increase in productivity. We calculate the present value of this increase by discounting it at an annual rate of seven percent. After subtracting the cost of education, we obtain the net present value of the current education system. For a cohort of 1,000 children in the target population, the current education system increases lifetime productivity by USD 264,517. These are society's profits from investing in the human capital of just 20 percent of 1,000 children in the target group – the net cost of education. This relatively high number is, of course, a direct reflection of the economic returns to primary education that were estimated from the wage-earnings function.

Next we reduce the under-five mortality from 200 to 10 per 1,000. This adds 190 productive people to the cohort, of whom 20 percent will increase their basic productivity by enrolling in primary education. This raises the net present value of the education system from USD 264,517 to USD 327,340. In other words, we could invest (USD 327,340 – USD 264,517) = USD 62,823 per

1000 high-risk children, just to increase their survival rates, and still break even. Given the relatively cheap measures that are available to prevent the premature death of a child (for example, a dose of oral rehydration therapy costs about two dollars) survival appears to be a good economic deal, on the sole basis of future productive contributions to society.

### Increase in Net Present Value of productivity due to improved social indicators

Our study shows that, for Scenario One, enrolment in primary school increased from 20 percent to 95 percent. Even without taking into account increased survival, the net present value of this benefit (without increased survival and measured only by the increased productivity of the cohort) would amount to USD 1,256,458. We were also able to determine the combined impact of the programme on the lifetime productivity of 1,000 children in the target group. We did this by first combining the programme's impact on survival and enrolment; then adding a reduction in drop-out and repetition rates; and then increasing progression rates for the target group to post-primary levels of education, from zero to the national averages. Under these assumptions, the combined impact of the programme has a net present value of USD 3,160,533.

A programme for preschool children that costs USD 3,160 per child, and that produces changes in the under-five mortality rate and in education indicators (in psycho-social development, and progress and performance in primary schools), would pay for itself in terms of higher lifetime productivity of the participants.

If a child enrols for four years in such a programme, at USD 350 per year, for a total cost of USD 1400, the cost-benefit ratio of the programme, on the basis of this benefit alone, would be 2.07. In other words, the net present value of the productivity related benefits of the PIDI Programme, exceeds the initial investment by 126 percent. Scenario Two produces a cost-benefit ratio of 1.38.

### Benefits other than increased productivity

Thus far, we have looked only at direct programme benefits and benefits that emerge through increased education. Among the latter, we looked at the effect of education on future productivity only. In this section we will look at one additional benefit that results from improved education: reduced future fertility.

We assume that because of the ECD programme, girls will enjoy six years education, instead of not enrolling in school at all. As a result of this, fertility could drop by 30 to 60 percent.[5] Using the lower bound, and a current fertility rate of nine in the target group, the ECD programme could reduce the expected number of births in a group of 1,000 ECD participants (500 girls), from 4,500 (fertility rate is nine), to 3000 (fertility rate is six).

The alternative costs of one birth averted is USD 250. The economic benefits of the ECD programme, as a result of reduced fertility, amounts to 1500 x USD 250 = USD 375,000 for 1,000 children enrolled in the programme. Since these benefits are savings on population programmes that would have to be implemented about 10 years in the future, the discounted value of this benefit amounts to USD 190,630 or USD 190 per enrolled child. It may seem contradictory to count both a death averted (reduced infant mortality rate) and a birth averted as programme benefits, but it is not. Under certain conditions, a reduction in fertility bestows benefits on society that go beyond the benefits in terms of improved mother's health or improved quality of life for the (fewer) children in the family. At the same time, once a child is born, it is beneficial for society to help her grow up and become a productive citizen. Both the increased levels of productivity and the lower number of births are benefits that result from ECD programmes.

### Calculating the cost-benefit ratio of the PIDI Programme

On the basis of the results presented in our full study, we are now able to calculate cost-benefit ratios for the Bolivian PIDI Programme. We use the productivity gains as discussed for

Scenarios One and Two. We add the benefits (to the family) of direct services, as well as the benefits to society of reduced future fertility. We are unable to quantify all benefits. We use USD 350 as the total annual cost of enrolment in the ECD programme, and assume that children enrol for four years, for a total cost of USD 1400. The cost/benefit ratio of the PIDI Programme lies between 2.38 and 3.06, making it clear that the value of the investment in the PIDI Programme compares favourably with the so-called 'hard' sectors.

**Conclusions**

Investments in the health and nutritional status of young children, and in their cognitive development, have multiple benefits. They range from the direct reduction in the number of children who suffer from ill health, to enjoying more productive lives as adults; to improving society by, for example, reducing crime rates.

In our full paper we have tried to list all benefits of ECD programmes in a systematic way and quantify them in USD terms where feasible.

In general, ECD programmes are expensive. Moreover, ECD investments trigger further investments in human capital, thus increasing the total cost of the programme. We have compared the quantifiable benefits of one ECD programme, PIDI, with its costs, and obtained cost-benefit ratios between 2.38 and 3.06. This ratio is highest for interventions that target population groups whose social indicators show severe deprivation (for example, high infant mortality rates, high malnutrition rates, low school enrolment, poor school performance, and so on).

The combined impact of integrated ECD programmes result in a large increase in the accumulation of human capital. Because of this, ECD programmes as an investment compare favourably in terms of economic rate of return alone, with investments in the so-called 'hard' sectors.

Whether governments should invest in ECD is a different question. The answer depends in part on one's assessment of the societal benefits (the externalities) of ECD and in part on one's definition of what constitutes a just society. The externality arguments in favour of public financing, are very similar to those for education in general.

We argue in the full paper that a strong case in favour of public financing (or subsidising) of ECD programmes can be made on the basis of a minimalistic sense of 'societal justice'. ECD programmes are likely to be most beneficial for children who grow up in the poorest households – the same households that cannot afford to pay for ECD services. This suggests that well-targeted public programmes can maximise society's benefits from ECD interventions while remaining affordable. Since a large part of the benefits of ECD are private benefits, it seems reasonable to expect better-off parents to contribute to the cost of this investment in the future of their children.

Societies cannot prosper if their children suffer. ECD programmes are a sound investment in the well-being of children and in the future of societies. By breaking the inter-generational cycle of deprivation, ECD programmes are a powerful tool to obtain the ultimate objective of development: to give all people a chance to live productive and fulfilling lives.

**notes**

1. Schweinhart *et al* use the cost of childcare as an estimate for the 'baby-sitting' services of the preschool programme. Schweinhart LJ, Barnes HV and Weikart DP. *Significant benefits: the High/Scope Perry Pre-school study through age 27*. (1993) Ypsilanti, Michigan High/Scope Press.

2. See Ruiz F and Giussani J. *Estudio de costos del projecto integral de desarrollo infantil (PIDI)*. (1997) UDAPSO, La Paz.

3. Net of overhead costs such as administration and evaluation.

4. Clemente RC., *Desarrollo psicosocial en menores a cinco años de edad*. (1996) UDAPSO, La Paz.

5. Throughout this example we use data from Summers LH, *Investing in all people: education of women in developing countries – Economic Development Institute Seminar Paper 45*. (1994) World Bank, Washington DC.

# *Early childhood development as an international policy issue*

*Cassie Landers/Ready to Learn*

*This article has been prepared from* Early Childhood Development as an International Policy Issue: Summary Report[1] *produced by Cassie Landers for Ready to Learn: The International Center on Care and Education of Children at the Academy for Educational Development (AED).[2] The report is about an informal information exchange that AED organised in November 1998 for United States and international experts on the care and development of young children. Among those attending were representatives from multilateral donors, and implementing and technical agencies.*

*This article consists of a selection of presentations from the day. It shows the priorities and strategies of some of the agencies, and the sorts of issues that are significant to them as they focus on being effective decision and policy makers.*

Trinidad and Tobago
Playing to learn project
photo: Servol

## international donor priorities and strategies for impact

***The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and early childhood development (ECD).***
*Presented by Sandra Huffman for Joseph Hunt.*
The ECD efforts at ADB focus on children from birth through eight years old with a particular emphasis on the interaction between nutrition, health, and school attendance and performance. For each of the age periods from prenatal to age eight, a specific outcome has been identified. The pre-pregnancy period is concerned with improved nutrition and pregnancy. In the newborn period the goal is to decrease low birth weight while increasing breastfeeding. For children in the first two years of life, the goal is to increase nutrition and health in order to decrease stunting, anaemia, vitamin deficiency and infections. The first three years should also focus on increased environmental stimulation through play and feeding. Children between the ages of four and six should have access to preschool development programmes while children entering the first two years of primary school should have an enriched curriculum at school.

***The World Bank and early childhood development (ECD).***
*Presented by Mary Young.*
The World Bank has placed increasing importance on ECD over the past five years. It began with a set of arguments, designed to convince policy makers and field directors of the importance of investing in early childhood programmes. The series of arguments, based on the work of Robert Myers, Cassie Landers and David Weikart, and supported by scientific findings, addressed the effect of ECD on socio-economic development, social equity, and the interacting needs of women and children. In collaboration with other donors, a range of programmes and strategies are currently being supported including integrated child development programmes, service delivery, caregiver education, and the creation of awareness and demand for ECD. Other initiatives have included the development of an economic model on the benefits of ECD programmes as well as a website on the design, implementation, and evaluation of field-based ECD initiatives. In 1996, the World Bank organised a conference focused on the first three years of life and a follow-up conference is planned for April, 2000.

Over the next two years, emphasis will be placed on broadening and strengthening the knowledge base about ECD. The World Bank intends to: (A) broaden clients' awareness and understanding of ECD and educate bank staff and partner agencies about ECD initiatives, (B) expand the content and increase the utilisation of the ECD computerised knowledge base, and (C) improve programme quality. In achieving the goal of improved programme quality, attention is placed on the development of programme monitoring and evaluation instruments as well as those designed to measure children's cognitive performance.

***The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and early child care and development (ECCD).***
*Presented by Ricardo Moran.*
The IDB is in the process of creating a framework for policies and strategies to support ECCD initiatives. The IDB recognises that the future of a child, as both a producer and consumer, is dependent on the socio-economic status of the family. Since 1985, the IDB has supported 85 programmes in which attention to the developmental needs of young children has been either the primary focus or an integrated component of a health or education initiative. These programmes are intended to break the cycle of poverty by improving opportunities for children of poor families.

The inter-generational transmission of poverty is fuelled by the following cycle. Poor parents with little schooling have children early without fundamental means or skills. Children raised in these environments enter school with impaired learning capacity which ultimately results in school failure and functional illiteracy. This in turn leads to children who drop out of school and, therefore, have few skills or knowledge and generate little income. For these youth, parenting begins early and the cycle of poverty begins anew.

IDB goals include: (A) more effective use of existing resources, (B) increased social demand for ECCD and (C) increased programme coverage. The strategies proposed to achieve these goals are to use existing resources more effectively by increasing monitoring and evaluation, encouraging public-private partnerships, using inter-sectoral approaches to strengthen synergies, carefully designing and implementing programmes, and using incentives more creatively and intensively. The strategies for increasing the demand for ECCD activities include social marketing campaigns, dissemination of hard data and increased parenting skills training. Finally, in an effort to increase ECCD coverage, additional support will be mobilised by shifting fiscal resources, tapping non-traditional funding sources, fund-raising efforts, and raising awareness of benefits through media campaign workshops and seminars.

In order to monitor the achievement of the above goals and strategies, emphasis is placed on the development of short and long term impact indicators including improved health and nutrition, emotional and social development, motor skills development, academic performance and mother's earnings. Long term impact will be measured by educational attainment as a proxy for life-time earnings.

**Social sector initiative strategies**

***High/Scope Foundation.***
*Presented by David Weikart.*
All children develop according to a series of sequential stages. In the first three years, the sensory motor period, the critical needs are in the areas of health, nutrition, and attachment. In the pre-operational period, the basic foundations are laid down, and include such behaviours as initiative, independence, responsibility, and social preparedness. Although the capacity for colour, shape, form, numbers, and vocabulary are all developing, the real issues are behavioural. If foundations are not instilled during this pre-operational period, it is too late. The next stage (the academic stage) is when children begin formal academic preparation.

Early childhood development (ECD) interventions work and provide an opportunity to break the cycle of poverty. According to the findings of the *High/Scope Perry Study*, children who were exposed to high quality ECD programmes, when interviewed at 27 years old, were more successful and stable than those who did not attend good ECD programmes. High/Scope Perry found that children exposed to good ECD programmes committed significantly less crime, graduated high school at a higher rate, owned more homes, earned higher salaries and used welfare less than those that did not receive high-quality early childhood care. This impact is most striking when shown in terms of the return on investment and the sources of public costs and benefits per participant. These programmes, when properly implemented, will pay for themselves.

There is also a considerable amount of research confirming the benefit of specific approaches and organisation techniques for the education of young children, particularly those between

four to six years of age. For example, young children need to practise taking control, and learn how to plan, conceptualise, make decisions, and talk about what they did. This kind of information must be disseminated in order to promote and provide high-quality ECD programming since it has also been shown that not all preschool programmes are beneficial. The work of High/Scope Foundation has shown that preschool programmes based on child planning and social reasoning are the most effective in the long term. But scripted, directive teaching and/or programmes inappropriately matched to the developmental stages of children, can actually have a negative impact on them. ECD is a social and political issue. Within this climate, one must be careful not to lose sight of the knowledge base about programmes and what makes them effective or harmful.

*Zero to Three.*
*Presented by Abby Griffin.*
Zero to Three is a national, non-profit organisation located in Washington DC, dedicated solely to advancing the healthy development of babies and young children. Founded in 1977, Zero to Three disseminates information on key developments, trains providers, promotes model approaches and standards of practice, and works to increase public awareness about the significance of the first three years of life. Zero to Three emphasises that by combining the talents of professionals from the fields of medicine, mental health, research, science, and child development, the diverse needs of the 'whole baby' can be met in the context of the family and community.

The acronym 'ACT' helps to define what Zero to Three is trying to accomplish. 'A' refers to Advancing

Zimbabwe: *Community kitchen*
Centre for Development Information & Education
photo: Paula Nimpuno-Parente

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India: *Observing the daily routine*
Stichting Filosofie en Meditatie Literacy Project
photo: Liana Gertsch

the state of knowledge through a range of conferences, workshops, and discussion groups. 'C' stands for Communication and the need to translate the former into messages available to all. Two interactive websites help to facilitate this communication. 'T' stands for Training and Technical assistance. In addition to training professionals, Zero to Three's aim is to identify emerging leaders within communities and provide them with the skills needed to transfer information directly to their communities.

One of Zero to Three's programmes, Heartstart, is concerned with the emotional foundation for school-readiness. It addresses questions like: What does it mean to be a learner? What does it mean to sustain it over time? What makes a life-long learner? In answering these questions, Heartstart found that the following characteristics are shaped in the first three years.

- Confidence and trust in yourself and others combined with the belief that you will succeed and that there are people there to help you. This is learned by 6 months.
- Curiosity and the freedom to explore and not be afraid of new tasks.
- Intentionality and the capacity to be persistent in achieving set goals.
- Self-control and the ability to take action when needed.
- Attachment, knowledge that the family is safe.
- Communication and the ability to express oneself through words, gestures and behaviours.
- Cooperation and the ability to share.

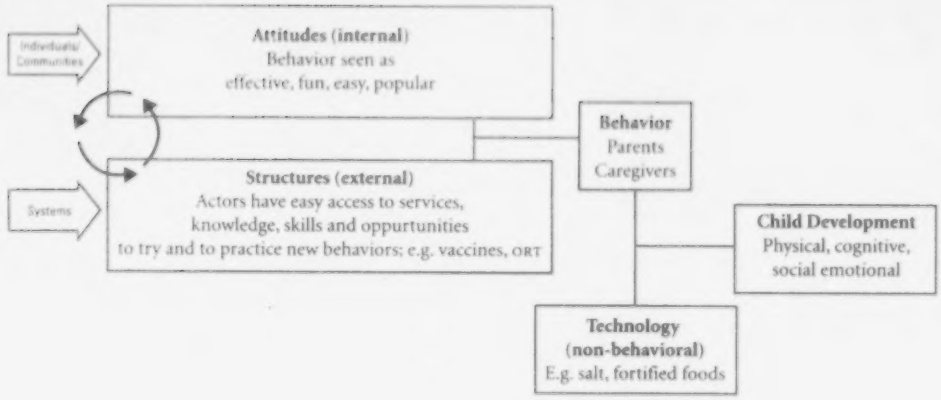
Zero to Three tries to integrate the basic needs of children into programmes, approaches and policies. These needs cut across cultures and include good physical health, safe supportive environments, unhurried time with primary caregivers, and responsive care giving.

The new research on the brain provides a strong foundation for the promotion of human capital development. Research suggests a need to support strong, consistent, caring relationships, and hire high quality staff. Programmes should be child-focused but include parent-focused activities utilising child, family and community-based approaches. Programmes should also focus on young children because the greater change occurs in them.

**Effective communicating**

***The Benton Foundation: Effective Language for Discussing Early Childhood Education and Policy.***
*Presented by Paula Antonovich.*
Bridging the distance between scholars and advocates to advance public understanding of, and support for, children's issues has been a major area of interest for the Benton Foundation. The Foundation hopes to provide child advocates with a body of work from which they can pick and choose new ideas, new sound bites, new frames, and a new language. Hopefully, this will help advance policy solutions for children. There is no one answer that fits all. Rather, what is offered is a palette of responses for child advocates to experiment with and match to each particular media and political environment.

Together with the Human Services Policy Center at the University of Washington, the Benton Foundation sought to identify a different set of conceptual frames and metaphors that might guide the interaction with the media in an effort to 'reframe' ECD. For example, the simple change in terminology from daycare and childcare to early childhood education or early learning can make a significant difference in support level for ECD. Together with scholars, the Benton Foundation seeks: to identify, explore, and explain the various options




available to children's advocates in furthering public understanding of the importance of investing in early childhood education; to explain the dominant metaphorical streams associated with the issue; to suggest the pros and cons of these options; and to suggest the best ways to re-frame the issue to support progressive reform.

One major finding showed the importance of moving the debate towards issues of quality of child development as a collective responsibility and need. Advocates need to reposition their campaigns for quality childcare to draw energy from the increased public concern for education. Thus early education becomes a solution to a problem already of concern and interest to the public.

Another finding suggests ways to avoid parent versus provider confrontations and instead, enlist parents as partners without shifting the responsibility back on their shoulders. Advocates and policy makers must be clear in indicating what they want to do, and communicate active, positive solutions because people are overwhelmed by big problems that don't seem to have any solutions.

***The Academy for Education Development.***
*Presented by Bill Smith.*
There appear to be three problems impeding clear and effective communication about policies and programmes for young children.

- *Science:* What works? (Especially for very young children, from birth to three years old)
- *Scale:* How can we do enough of 'what works' to make a population-based difference?
- *Funding:* Given competing priorities, who will pay for it and why will they pay for it?

It is instructive to consider several experiences from the health sector which shed light on how effective communication strategies contribute to positive impact.

Bring parents and caregivers to the table. In the final analysis, it is they who have the greatest impact on the lives of children. Parents and caregivers have their own priorities and strategies, and they can translate your messages into terms meaningful for them. In the campaign against AIDS, the inclusion and leadership of HIV positive people transformed the agenda and the strategy for public education and behaviour change.

Research should not interfere with the work of programmes. The need for clarity, indicators and measurement is a legitimate concern in the field of early

childhood as it is in health and education. However, debates over details and specifics must not confuse messages and weaken the impetus for change. If known benefits outweigh potential drawbacks, strategic communication with one voice may be called for. One example: oral rehydration packets were distributed while experts were still engaged in intense room debates over the best way to rehydrate during diarrhoea. Although the packet strategy may have been sub-optimal, the packets saved many children's lives.

The figure on the previous page presents a partial model of the flow of communication for behaviour change, using examples from the health field. The complexity of changing attitudes and structure contrasts with the relative simplicity of introducing a technology as the focal point for change.

This model suggests there are three basic paths to child development:

1. improved non-behavioural technologies;
2. structural changes to make behaviour change easily; and
3. changes in attitudes towards behaviour to overcome internal barriers to change.

**The introduction of non-behavioural technologies is generally a faster approach than mounting campaigns to persuade people to adopt a new behaviour. Savvy efforts to promote specific models and tools for cognitive and social development – even if they are imperfect – may be a route to more effective communication about ECD. However, when non-behavioural opportunities are exhausted, a great deal can be accomplished through structural and attitudinal change.**

**notes**

1. Copies of the summary and full reports can be obtained from Ready to Learn: The International Center on Care and Education of Children, The Academy for Educational Development, 1875 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington DC 20009-1202, USA;
tel: +1 202 884 8265; fax: +1 202 884 8405;
email: ready@aed.org

2. Full details of Ready to Learn can be found on Internet at www.aed.org

Peru: *Ready for anything*
photo: Gerry Salole

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# *Kenya: working for viability through project partners*

*Mirza Jahani*

*Mirza Jahani is the Regional Chief Executive Officer of the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) in East Africa. In this article, which is based on an interview with Jim Smale, he describes the approach of AKF to community development in Kenya: that it is by maximising the potential of communities to achieve social, economic and political viability that sustained development can be achieved. Within this broad approach, holistic early childhood development (ECD) programmes have their key places and roles – and the best chance of being sustained.*

ECD has always been a core concern of the Aga Khan Foundation although, in the early years, it tended to stay within the area of education. Our philosophy now is that children's development is multi-faceted and education is one of the several components required in a holistic approach for effective ECD (see box on page 28). This reaches outside of what is obviously necessary to sustain healthy growth in all areas of a children's development. It also embraces family livelihood; communication; the number of siblings; maternal health and well-being; family stress; the roles and impact of fathers; and so on. It means paying careful attention to the local context and culture of families and thereby understanding, and then building on the strengths within families and communities.

However, as a policy maker wanting to be effective, I take this one step further: if communities are indeed to be the source of that enrichment, they have to be viable as communities – and that includes being economically viable. If this is to happen, it means that people have to understand how their community works, how they can organise themselves, what their opportunities are, how they could exploit those opportunities, and so on. That is where the roots of viability lie in marginalised communities and it means community development initiatives are essential. It is only within them that early childhood programmes can be launched and have much hope of being sustained adequately. That is why there is a necessary link between ECD and wider community development.



photo: Aga Khan Foundation

## AKF's Young Children and the Family Programme

In 1983, when the Aga Khan Foundation formulated its education strategy, early childhood education (ECE) was included as an important element – making AKF one of the few international donors to specifically address the development and education of young children at that time.

Initially, the ECE work focused on the creation and testing of curriculum models that promoted cognitive stimulation of young children, and teacher training systems for school based preschools. During the 1980s, research and the work of AKF and other agencies working on the ground, showed that young children actively interact with, and are influenced by, their surroundings from the very beginning. This enhanced understanding of the important synergistic relationships amongst the different environments in which children grew, demanded a wider approach.

AKF therefore broadened the title of its ECE programme to the Young Children and the Family Programme. This change was based on four principal lessons learned from AKF's work in ECE:

1. that early intervention programmes have a positive effect on later school experiences;
2. that parental and community participation is critical in early childhood efforts because of the interdependence that exists between child, family and community;
3. that women's and children's lives are closely linked and programmes for one should not be carried out without consideration of the needs of the other; and
4. that direct programming for women can be an effective way of enhancing children's development and growth.

This is already common practice: work for children is often one element of a wider programme of development. There is a danger of course: if your aim is to be effective in ECD, you must make sure that children remain at the centre. And that is true if you are supporting a broader programme yourself, or if you are supporting an ECD programme that is a coherent part of a wider programme supported by other agencies.

### Partners as catalysts

The roots of economic viability may lie within communities but that does not mean that the communities themselves are aware of them, or that they have the skills to identify and nourish them so that viability becomes a reality. Our partner organisations – those that actually operate the projects – have to work with communities to devise and operate projects that move them towards this goal. And it is the extent to which the projects that we fund enable communities to stand on their own and control their own futures that provides us with the measure of our effectiveness. That is radically different from measuring effectiveness by the quantity of work, the number of beneficiaries, the extent to which a collection of relatively small objectives are realised, cost-effectiveness, and so on.

To achieve such a fundamental change demands a more capable kind of partner organisation to run projects, to make things happen. A partner that is only a specialist in a small range of development areas is too limited, we need enablers and catalysts.

That means carrying out an institutional analysis, finding out if the partner is a doer, a problem-solver, an organisation that is able to direct programmes in an ever-changing environment – because there are no blueprints. It means looking at its leadership to make sure that the organisation will stay on track while simultaneously adapting itself to provide

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> *If you see the resources and you see the wealth and the talent of the people in East Africa, you think to yourself there is absolutely no reason why there should be so much poverty.*

what the communities need. And it also means finding out how it is governed, how it is managed, how it makes decisions, how it operates its accounting system, and so on.

Now, the problem is that you don't find these sorts of organisations easily – if at all. But what you do find are organisations that clearly have the potential. You have to work with them to discover what they need to upgrade them so they are capable of delivering in the terms that I have discussed; and you have to make grants for that upgrading.

That is the kind of thing that the Bernard van Leer Foundation did with National Centre for Early Childhood Education in Kenya many years ago, and we in the Aga Khan Foundation now look at institutional capacity development much more systematically than we used to.

### Economic viability in practice

At first sight, the potential for economic viability seems poor in many marginalised committees. But there has to be something to build on and, if the community is to survive there, it must be developed. In rural areas of Kenya the two principal assets that people have are their labour and their land. But the productivity of that labour and that land is often not very great – after all the community is marginal because the land is poor. The debate then is whether you take people away from their land so they can use their labour more productively elsewhere, or whether you try and make something of what they have where they are.

The Kwale Rural Support Programme on the coast of Kenya (see box on page 32) set out to see if it is possible to make sufficient improvements in the productivity of the land to carry a fairly large community of people. In general, the starting point is self-sufficiency in food production and that is followed by a move on to income generation. In terms of food production, small changes in farming practice, the introduction of organic fertiliser, tree planting, soil conservation, improving the availability of water with small catchment dams, and things like that, actually produce massive improvements.

To achieve this, the community must organise itself and to do that it needs support – support that is provided by our partner organisations. They help the community to build robust village organisations that govern themselves, look for possibilities, make better decisions. As you see this happening it may appear that our project partners are simply helping communities to improve agricultural practice, or construct an irrigation dam. But something much bigger is going on. People are learning to express their needs and aspirations, to contribute their ideas to finding ways forward, to learn to fend for themselves, to take decisions for the good of everyone. I'm constantly amazed and impressed by what people know, and how prepared and committed they are to improving their livelihoods. To encourage them, we directly support them by providing small incentives as they work to achieve what they want – for example, we might provide a pump that is part of a sustainable water system.

### Keeping things alive

Whilst the AKF believes that a community development programme is a long term effort, we would normally only give support to individual villages for three or four years. This allows us to move our work to new villages as the older ones graduate. At the end of that time, a community should be skilled and experienced enough to sustain itself

> *On an unannounced visit, we found the community members busy: they were fixing a valve in a water pipeline; they were fixing the roof of the school; they were planting trees. And it was totally self-generated. They didn't know we were coming, there was no dancing and parading for these visitors from outside. It so touched me because I realised that actually we had unleashed their energies and they were getting on with it.*

economically; run programmes in areas such as ECD; maintain economically crucial facilities such as the water scheme and a credit and loan scheme; and operate an economic infrastructure that will include a village development fund. It may well also be able to afford a small sum to pay a 'professional' village person for advice and support.

That is as far as we have reached and we are well aware that, by itself, a village institution with that capability is not only still fragile and vulnerable but also has clear limits to its potential for growth. However, we expect that the village now has a greater energy and that this can be used for the development of cluster-level institutions between villages. For this to happen, a suitable infrastructure has to be developed – something like a local council, the first ever local government structure at this level. If that can be achieved, then it's necessary to make a formal link to existing government structures that currently stop at sub-locational level. Making that link is to establish continuity from the grassroots through to central government.

The next step is logical: that the resources have to be fed down the chain from central government into the villages. This is the aim and we are working towards it. Meanwhile, we also see that the chain does not have to be complete: we have already worked with the Kenyan Ministry of Health at the national level, along with many others, to help devise a decentralisation plan. We are able to say: 'In this district, we can help you implement that plan because we have already supported sustainable general development there'.





And we can add weight to our argument by agreeing to make a separate grant for strengthening district health management teams that have developed as a consequence of the work of our partner organisations.

From funding early childhood initiatives through to funding initiatives that develop these kinds of possibilities is a major advance in terms of our effectiveness. We use our money to better and more lasting effect, we draw on our experience at strategic level and we simultaneously monitor what is happening so that we can make additional key interventions at the most relevant times.

### Looking to the future

To make ourselves more effective, we have to plug gaps in our knowledge and experience. These are more in the 'how to do it' than in the 'what to do'. One example is the question of how to forge that missing link in the chain between grassroots village organisations and government. We'll spend a lot of our time looking at that.

A second challenge is to refine our advocacy role. That means further developing our capacity to hear what is coming up from the grassroots. In East Africa now there are opportunities for people to form groups and to debate and to question openly. This is supported by

Kenya: *Learning the basics*
Madrassa Preschool Programme
photo: Aga Khan Foundation

a strong media that helps debate about how things should be done in areas such as developing a civil society. Our principal role here is to promote better policies, working with major partners.

A third challenge is to embrace the World Bank (in Kenya) and other large development agencies' willingness to examine examples of effective implementation of programmes and policies, and work with those who have the experience, the knowledge and the strategic perspectives. The most exciting opportunity here is the recent agreement by the World Bank to provide a large loan to the government of Kenya. The loan includes the condition that international organisations with extensive experience can advise on the effective allocation of those parts of the loan that are intended to support community development. The Government of Kenya has already taken the first step of inviting six NGOs to collaborate, including AKF and the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

The core task is to identify a group of NGOs that know what to deliver and how to deliver it so that it makes a difference. They then have to demonstrate to the World Bank and the Kenyan government



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that the investment of loan money is best guided by their experiences. We have got to get this right: it is a major test of our effectiveness; and on it depends our invitation to the policy making table in the future.

For me, the role of an effective grantmaker is to be part of a chain that links to the village level committees and institutions. They work out what it is that they need, and we provide what is necessary for them to fulfil those needs themselves. For example, we might bring in a partner agency that is prepared to work with the villagers on their terms so that they absorb the technology and the ideas, and then are able to carry these forward. Of course there are problems in meeting certain needs. The most obvious one is when you have to connect villages to government services. In the short term, some elements of the supply side can only be sustained by the government – how can poor communities afford immunisation for example? In the long term most elements must come from the government. But the economic benefits of providing the means for highly capable village structures to deliver are obvious. ❍



*The Kwale Rural Support Programme*

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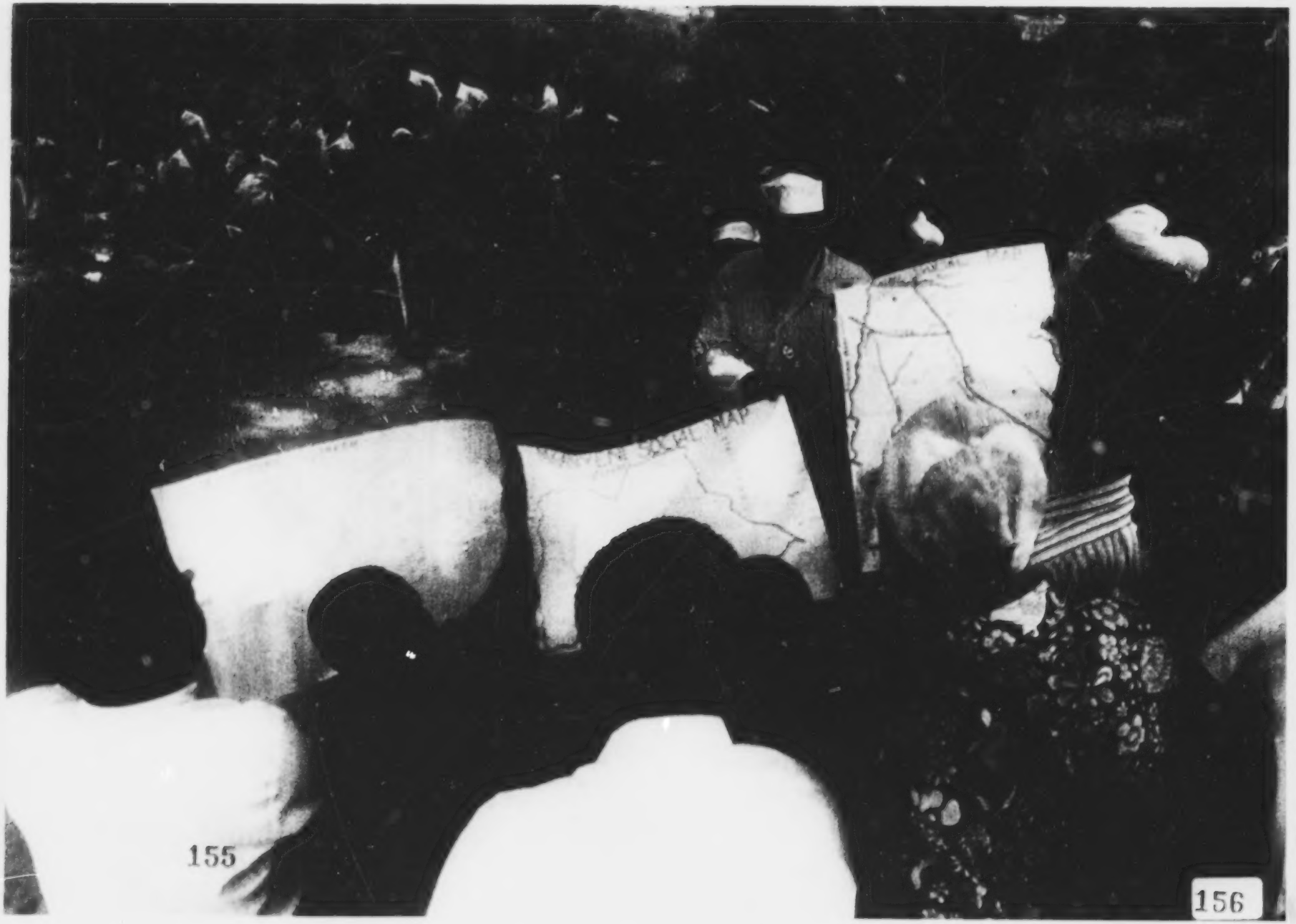

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# *Southern Africa: guidelines for good practice*

*Mokhethi Moshoeshoe*

*Mokhethi Moshoeshoe is Executive Director of the Southern African Grantmakers Association (SAGA), an independent, voluntary and non-profit association of individuals and organisations involved in the funding of development in Southern Africa. It's mission is to optimise the relevance, efficiency and impact of grantmaking in Southern Africa.*

*In this article, which is based on an interview with Jim Smale, Mokhethi Moshoeshoe offers his own reflections on what it takes to build strong partnerships between the grantmakers and the grantees. As he does so, he blends them with the experiences of SAGA as it developed its* Guidelines for good practice. *Drawing on his own experiences both in seeking partnerships during his long career in NGOs, and in his current position as head of a major entity in the grantmaking world, he especially stresses the need for close and productive relationships across what has sometimes been a divide.*

SAGA has invested a year in developing a document with its members that takes the question of effective grantmaking head on. It is called *Guidelines for good practice*. We did this because it sometimes seemed that there was a huge black hole between the grantmakers and the grantees. There was a sense of needing to somehow cross this gap or close it, to improve on the situation where all you might get back was a report to answer the question: 'What is the impact that we have been making?'

However, before I discuss this, I want to give some personal reflections on what development is because understanding the nature of development actually guides us towards being effective as grantmakers. I believe development is a process of growth to enable human beings to reach their potential and handle their own situations. That means that development is also an empowerment process, which in turn gives foundations a way of measuring their effectiveness: the extent to which you empower people is also the extent to which you can reduce your support. I link this to the need to find ways in which communities can begin to recognise and build on their own assets so that they become major agents in ensuring the sustainability of their own development. I believe that all communities have assets, just as businesses have. That doesn't necessarily mean money: there are assets such as trust, a sense of community, a sense of common wealth, a sense of common vision, willingness to form partnerships for the common good, a sense of needing to reweave the social fabric, and so on.

For the grantmaker, working with these intangibles is a challenge: it's easy to fund something that can be seen and clearly measured such as a building, or a piece of participatory action research. But grantmakers must accept that these intangibles are fundamental to moving communities away from dependency, and therefore must find ways to support work that will strengthen them. This is in tandem with work that will make material differences in putting communities on the road to sustained development. All of this means that successful development processes are about much more than money. Of course, it is always money that people talk about but money from a grantmaker will never replace real livelihoods. And of course real financial independence is crucial in the long term, but that can only come via broad-based projects that take advantage of the tangibles and the intangibles – all the assets that communities have.



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South Africa: *Getting down to work*
Family in Focus project
photo: Rien van Gendt

## Key lessons from saga's Guidelines for good practice

1. *Be focused.* One key lesson that has emerged for us from our year of work in developing the guide is that you cannot successfully be everything to everybody as a grantmaker. You've got a certain amount of money and of course there are many ways in which it could make a difference in people's lives. But you will never have enough money to address all the social problems in the world. That is not a very startling idea. But it is important because many foundations currently have broad interests and it will be painful for them to make choices. This is because foundations are run by people, not machines. People see need and they want to respond. But if the people who run foundations really want to make an impact, they have to specialise, and – by setting precise goals – define exactly where their grants will make a difference.

2. *Build real partnerships.* You and your grantmaker must get together. I would like to add something here from my own experiences. Before joining SAGA,



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I spent ten years of my life as a grantee approaching grantmaking foundations. From that side of the fence, it was clear to me that the nature and effectiveness of the relationships I had with those organisations were really determined by individual programme officers. It was not the organisations that determined the nature of those relationships, it was individuals: how we related to each other at the personal level; how we related to the needs and objectives of each other's organisations; how well each of us understood what the other expected. That means that a successful grantmaker has to have programme officers who can build that kind of relationship – and, by the way, it also means that applicants must be ready to build it too. What is required is much more than knowledge of the subject area and the ability to communicate well: it is a matter of being prepared to enter into and constantly preserve and improve a mutually beneficial relationship that depends on complete trust and confidence on both sides.

That means throwing away many of the things that work against that relationship. For example, since I have worked on both sides of the fence, I know all the tricks there can be on both sides – I know that there sometimes can be hidden motives, agendas, realities, problems, failures, and so on. But if you really want to build this relationship, you have to make a real commitment to the project; you have to recognise that what you feel about a project is as important as what you know logically; you must give time to the project; you must be able to empathise with those in the project; and you must trust people, read between the lines, and sense the broader picture. And all of this is in addition to the huge amount of direct work that must be done. To accomplish all of this, you need programme officers who have a passion to do their job well, a passion to make a difference.

Sometimes programme officers do not have enough time to give more adequate attention, to build the necessary relationship. They are under pressure to give out the money appropriately, to ensure that it will make a difference, so they don't build that relationship because they haven't got the time to do it well. So, although they are not to blame, they actually fall at the first crucial hurdle in properly supporting a project.

3. *Add value.* You can do this, for example, by supporting the building of institutional capacity and the professionalisation of people in the project. We have to ask ourselves if our grantee partners are experts in areas that they have chosen to work with. That sounds odd: if they don't know enough about their area of interest, why did we fund them? Well, perhaps we funded them because they have a good track record in operating well-focused, effective projects. Now there has to be an audit to find out what else they need to equip them for their work. Part of that capacity building can draw on resources that foundations have, and can also benefit from the ability of foundations to access knowledge. Those resources can be shared; that knowledge can be imparted. The grantees need this but they are very busy trying to survive.

4. *Don't be afraid of taking risks.* Running social enterprises means taking risks because, in the history of development, nobody has ever come up with infallible ways, perfect models, magic wands. You have to accept that you are learning, that you learn through doing new things in new ways, and you learn a lot from successes but you can learn even more through mistakes. I link this to the relationship that you build with the project. A good relationship means that when the risk does not pay off either the grantmaker or the grantee will have the confidence to say 'We really got it wrong, let's work together at what needs to be done now'. That's such an uncommon reaction, but it is does not help anyone's effectiveness if projects claim that everything has been 100 percent successful. Let's admit that we are all sticking our necks out; we are all vulnerable.

5. *Accept your limitations.* Admit that you don't know it all. What drives us is our passion to make a difference in people's lives and build up resources that will help us to do this. If we knew how to do this, the world would have changed a long time ago. But it hasn't, and we shouldn't waste time now worrying about if we can plan everything so that it will always come out as it should. We have got a long way to go in changing the world. In the

process of development enterprise, or social enterprise of any kind, there are many things that are way beyond our control – we have to accept this. We also have to accept that we have to feel our way in supporting projects, and that projects have to feel their way in doing the work. They have to learn as they go; they have to try out new ideas; they have to change processes, even approaches, as they try to reach their objectives. Again, I make the link to the nature of the relationship that we form with them: we need to know that they don't know; they need to know that we support them as they learn; they need to know that we are learning from them.

6. *Measure impact.* We have developed instruments and these take the form of indicators for success. They should help us to find out the extent to which our interventions actually have done what they were intended to – what return we got on the investment that we made. In doing this, we should look to see if we can learn from business. That doesn't mean looking at the bottom line – trying to make a financial gain. But we could look at profit in terms of the quantity and quality of change that the projects we fund make. Loss is then a lack of impact or a negative impact. There's an example that we can study here: businesses are now beginning to carry out social and ethical accounting to measure their social impact. They forget about profit for a while and remind themselves that they affect people and they affect societies in both good and bad ways. We could usefully take account of their ways of measuring and understanding that.

But as we try to measure impact, we must avoid taking the blame for not changing things that are well beyond our powers to change. We are not the only players for good or ill here; and our capacities are anyway very limited when set against big or especially intractable challenges.



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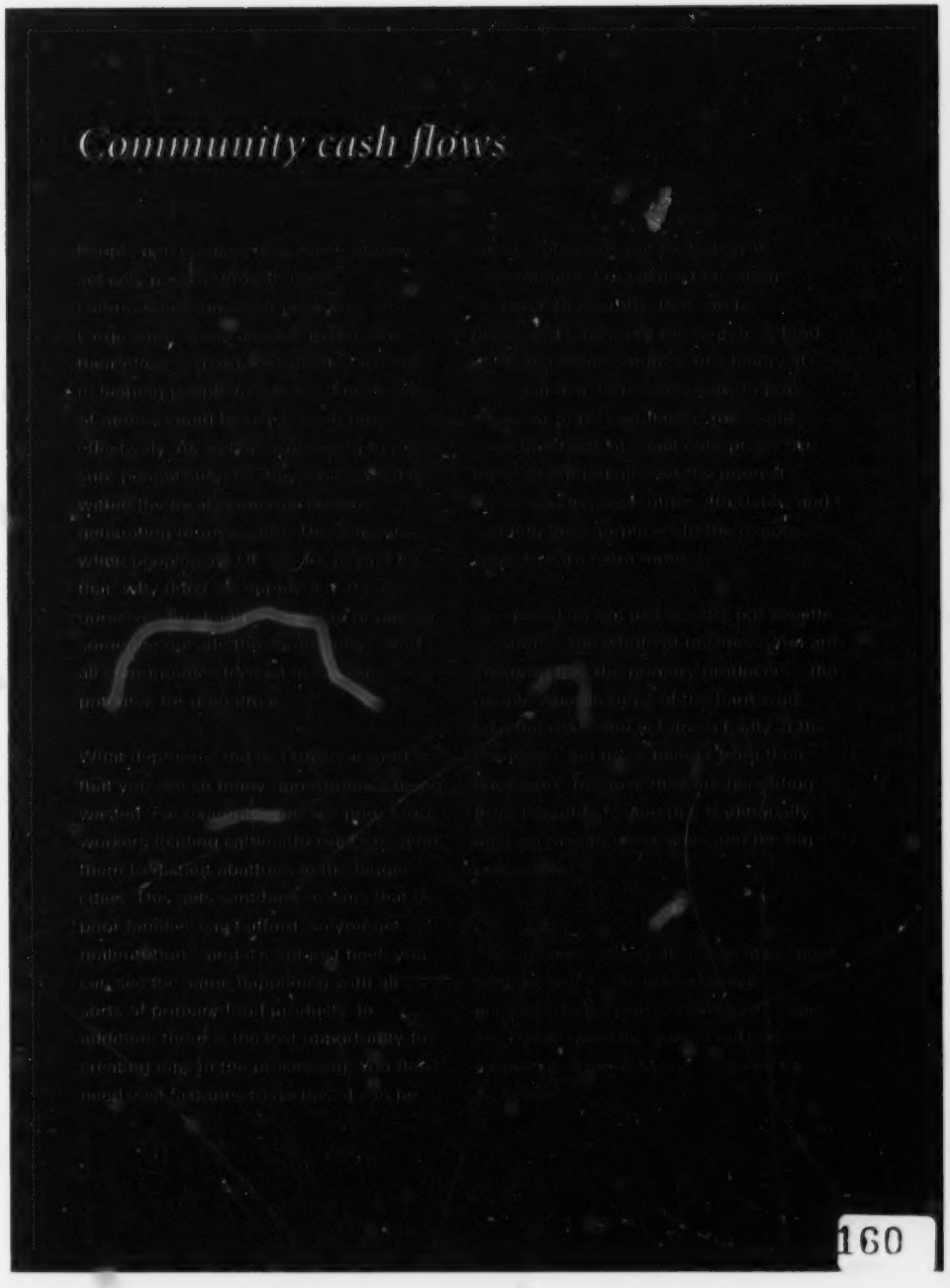

# *Cambodia:*
## *continuing to learn - for the benefit of children*

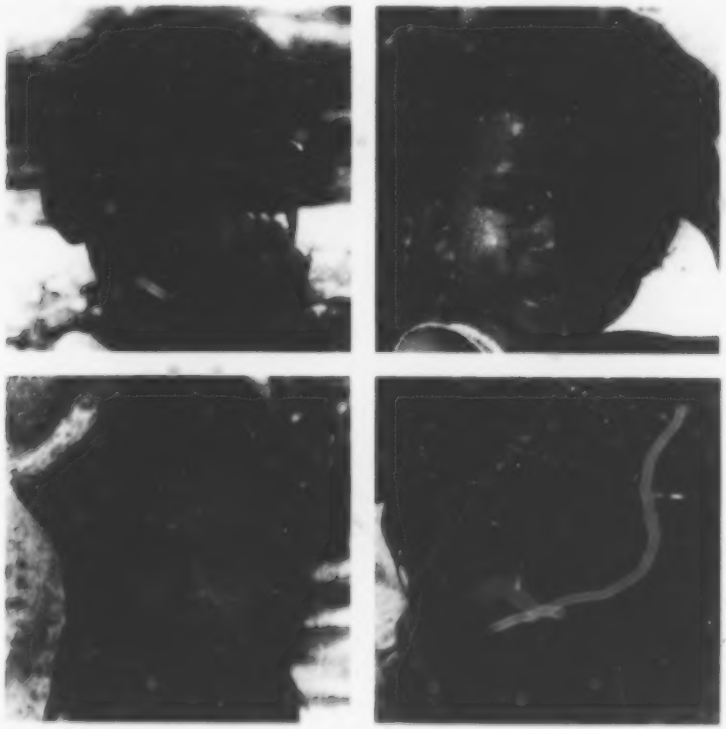

photo: Redd Barna Cambodia

*Redd Barna Combodia*

*This article consists of extracts from the* Ten Year Anniversary Report *1988-1998 of Redd Barna (Norwegian Save the Children) Cambodia. It looks at aspects of 10 years of establishing policies and setting up programmes in a country that has experienced civil war, political turbulence and unrest – with children among those suffering most. The extracts review Redd Barna Cambodia's progression from providing emergency aid to establishing child-oriented development programmes that started from building local capacity. The impressive consequences of this evolution reflect the importance of identifying opportunities, being alert to changing circumstances, and being willing to learn.*

*More information about Redd Barna's programmes in Cambodia and elsewhere can be obtained from Redd Barna, Hammersborg torg 3, PO box 6902, St Olav's Plass, 0130 Oslo, Norway. Tel: +47 (0)22 990 900; fax: +47 (0)22 990 870; email: post@reddbarna.no.*

### From emergency relief to long term, child-oriented development

Redd Barna's history in Cambodia began in 1979 with emergency relief channelled through the Oxfam-led NGO Consortium. From 1983, activities for the rehabilitation of health, food production and education were carried out from the Thailand office in direct cooperation with authorities and other NGOs. Five years later, in November 1998, a country office opened its doors in Phnom Penh.

With the establishment of an office, a long-term development programme was set up. During its first years, Redd Barna's principal tools to help improve the living situation of children were on the one hand village-based community development, on the other institutional upgrading and training of personnel in the fields of education, health and child development.

From the early days, training of staff has been given much emphasis, to address the need for qualified human resources. In 1998, 70 qualified Cambodians worked in the organisation, including in senior positions, and the number of expatriates was four.

As some of the needs seen in the early days had been met, and the conditions in general had changed significantly, Redd Barna reviewed and subsequently changed its strategy in 1996. Partnership, child rights, advocacy and focus on vulnerable groups of children were identified as the new core; and the emergency feature finally gave way to a long-term, child-oriented programme.

### Building relationships, designing a strategy

*This extract offers some reflections by Redd Barna's first Resident Representative in Cambodia, Per Egil Wam, on his return to the country.*

Back for the first time in many years, Per Egil Wam recalls the setting in which Redd Barna Cambodia commenced its pledge to support Cambodian children. He was the organisation's first Resident Representative and ten years ago he arrived, to set up an office, and started chiselling out the role of the organisation.

photo: Edgar Kjøsterud/Redd Barna Cambodia

> *I hope we will continue to learn and develop, yet remain youthful, curious and open-minded.*

## *Education in Kampong Chang*

Per Egil Wam points out many changes since then: infrastructure has modernised, the issues fuelling discussions have altered, the general standard of living has improved. And international contacts are visible everywhere; Cambodia is now part of the international community.

The NGOs present in Cambodia in the late 1980s came to play a significant role in that regard, partly within the framework of the NGO Forum, according to Per Egil Wam: 'We were determined to support Cambodia, and took an active part in the attempt to end the international isolation. Perhaps our influence and that of other NGOs came to enjoy (was bigger than) our budgets. But it was important that we tried to work out and stick to a firm line in the political context that we were in'.

This was far from the only challenge facing the development community. 'The devastating results of genocide were evident everywhere', Per Egil Wam recalls. 'Starvation was a reality for many children, and the Khmer Rouge a large threat. Infrastructure was extremely basic, the needs of the people were endless and the structures to cater for development cooperation not yet shaped. The post office in Phnom Penh lodged the only international phone in the country, mail arrived once a week and the city of Phnom Penh had a nine o'clock curfew.'

Although selective when giving NGOs permission to work in the country, the government backed those they had welcomed and worked closely with them, showing gratitude as well as resolution to bring Cambodia back to its feet. The Cambodian National Council for Children and the NGO Forum became increasingly important actors in coordinating efforts of NGOs. Redd Barna Cambodia was an active member of both.

For Per Egil Wam, the first year revolved around designing a strategy for Redd Barna Cambodia. Community development, health and education became the principal fields of work, and the specific role of Redd Barna was to build capacity and assist in institutional upgrading. Another important task was to form relationships and identify resourceful people to cooperate with, he recollects, adding that for him, those relations remain precious:

'In spite of the hardship and predicaments I experienced on the part of the people, the children in particular, Cambodia is largely something positive in my mind and will always be special to me.'



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## Redd Barna in Cambodia today

*This extract offers some reflections by Redd Barna Cambodia's current Resident Representative, Gunnar Andersen, about where the organisation stands today.*

Childhood – the first, say, ten years of life – is a time when we learn basic skills and establish the platform for our future. Adolescence is the crucial and often painful period between childhood and adulthood that follows, when we resist as well as embrace maturing. This is somehow also applicable to an organisation like ours. During our ten years in Cambodia, Redd Barna has learnt basic skills and developed, while questioning its role and surroundings. Mature adults at times believe they have all the answers, hence forgetting to challenge themselves, forgetting to listen to the young. Today, approaching adolescence, I hope the organisation will continue to learn and develop, yet remain youthful, curious and open-minded.

Four years ago, we had 18 expatriate staff. A tremendous and successful effort in the mid 1990s to develop human resources has allowed us to leave that stage behind. In 1999, the full-time expatriate staff have been reduced to two, and all departments in charge of our working areas are headed and staffed by well-qualified Cambodian nationals.

1998 was the initial year of our new strategic period, stretching into the next century. The new strategy has brought a clearer child focus, and a final transition from self-implemented projects to programmes carried out in partnership with local organisations and the Royal Government. Our main working areas are basic education; promotion of children's rights; and support to children in especially difficult circumstances, for example, sexually exploited children, street children, and disabled children.

photo: Redd Barna Cambodia

# *The 1999 Poster Competition*

*Once again the 1998 Poster Competition produced an excellent collection of high quality photographs and drawings, many of which offered tantalising insights into the world of early childhood. Now I would like to invite Foundation-supported projects to make the 1999 Poster Competition an equally big success! You can enter photographs, children's drawings or even children's collages: the important thing is that they show aspects of early childhood development. The winning entry will become the Foundation's 1999 Poster and this will be distributed in more than 100 countries worldwide. Others will be used throughout the Foundation's range of publications.*

Criteria:

- photographs must show young children engaged in some kind of activity, experience or interaction that illuminates early childhood;
- photographs must be sharp and clear, with good contrast between the lightest areas and the darkest;
- photographs can be in black and white or colour, prints or slides;
- photographs should measure at least 9 x 13 centimetres;
- drawings and collages should be made by a child up to the age of 7 years old;
- drawings and collages should measure at least 9 x 13 centimetres and should be suitable for reproduction.

You can send in as many photographs, drawings and collages as you wish.

Please include the following details, if these are available and appropriate for publication – but please do not write on the backs of materials:

- the name of the photographer, or the child or children who made the drawing/collage;
- the context of the photograph – for example, at home, in centre, within a home visiting programme, and so on;
- some details about the children and adults featured in the photographs and what they are doing;
- some details about the child/children who made the drawing/collage (for example, their age, where they are from, where the picture was made – at home, in a centre or within a home visiting programme, and so on);
- some details about what the drawing/collage is about;
- the location – country, region, town/village, and so on;
- any other useful or interesting information.

Please note:

1. the copyright of submitted materials that we use will, of course, remain with the originator, but we may wish to use them in any other Foundation publications without specific permission, in which case all will be credited with the name of the originator;
2. because our publications are free, we are not able to make any payment for submitted materials;
3. unfortunately, we are not able to return materials submitted, whether we use them or not.

Please send your contributions to arrive by the end of September 1999, to the address shown on the inside front cover. The results will be featured in the February 2000 edition of *Early Childhood Matters*.

***Sonja Wehrmann***
*Department of Programme*
*Documentation & Communication*

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# About the Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation based in The Netherlands. It operates internationally, concentrating its resources on early childhood development.

The Foundation's income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer (1883-1958), a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist who, in 1919, founded an industrial and consumer packaging company that was to become Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer NV. This is currently a limited company operating in over 40 countries worldwide.

During his lifetime Bernard van Leer supported a broad range of humanitarian causes. In 1949, he created the Bernard van Leer Foundation, to channel the revenues from his fortune to charitable purposes after his death. When he died in 1958, the Foundation became the beneficiary of the entire share capital of the then privately owned Van Leer enterprise and other assets.

Under the leadership of his son Oscar van Leer, who died in 1996, the Foundation focused on enhancing opportunities for children growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage to optimally develop their innate potential.

In seeking to achieve this objective, the Foundation has chosen to concentrate on children from 0-7 years of age. This is because scientific findings have demonstrated that interventions in the early years of childhood are most effective in yielding lasting benefits to children and society.

The Foundation accomplishes its objective through two interconnected strategies:

1 an international grant-making programme in selected countries aimed at developing contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood care and development; and

2 the sharing of knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development that primarily draws on the experiences generated by the projects that the Foundation supports, with the aim of informing and influencing policy and practice.

A leaflet giving fuller details of the Foundation and its grant-making policy is available, as is a Publications List. Please contact the Department of Programme Documentation and Communication, at the addresses given on the back cover.

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PO Box 82334, 2508 EH The Hague, The Netherlands. Tel: +31 (0)70 351 2040. Fax: +31 (0)70 350 2378. email: registry@bvleer.nl. internet: www.bernardvanleer.org

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Tel: +31 (0)70 351 2040
Fax: +31 (0)70 350 2373
email: registry@bvleef.nl
www.bernardvanleer.org

**Series Editor**: Jim Smale
**Guest Editor**: Ellen Meredith Ilfeld
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If you are interested in contributing to *Early Childhood Matters*, please contact the Editor for a preliminary discussion and to obtain a copy of our 'Guide for Authors'. Contributions must be related to early childhood development and should draw on direct practical experience with young children, their families and communities. Please note that the Foundation does not pay for contributions because *Early Childhood Matters* is generally distributed free of charge. Please also note that we allow free copying for non-commercial purposes.

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**Cover**: *Namibia: Health Unlimited Project*
**photo**: *Paula Nimpuno-Parente*

**Inside front cover**: *July 1999*
*Effectiveness Initiative Workshop, The Hague*
**photo**: Angela Ernst

**Back cover**: *July 1999*
*Effectiveness Initiative Workshop, The Hague*
**photo**: Jim Smale

As well as *Early Childhood Matters* the Foundation produces a wide range of publications about early childhood development. All are available – free of charge for single copies – to organisations or individuals interested in this field. A publications list is also available: please contact the Foundation at the addresses above and on the back cover.

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# *Mapping the contours of effective programming:*

## The Effectiveness Initiative 1999-2002

In January 1999, the Bernard van Leer Foundation and partner organisations in the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development* initiated a three year investigation known as the Effectiveness Initiative (EI). Our overall goals within this effort are to discover what we can about what makes an effective programme work, and to initiate an international dialogue on effectiveness that deepens our understanding of how to create and/or support effective programming for young children and families.

To achieve these goals, the EI set the following objectives:

- to identify ten diverse Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes that people consider effective (and that have operated for at least ten years) and to explore them in depth;
- to engage people from the chosen sites, together with staff from international NGOs, to work in cross-site, cross-cultural teams to carry out such explorations;
- to learn how to apply qualitative research techniques in the examination of ECD programmes;
- to create tools that allow us to understand the complexity of these programme experiences more fully;
- to stimulate cross-site and inter-agency dialogue about what makes ECD programmes effective, how, and for whom;
- to understand more fully the interplay between a programme's processes, activities, and outcomes; and
- to map the contours of effectiveness, defining what makes a programme effective, under what conditions, and for whom; what supports and what hinders a project under particular conditions and in particular contexts; and what these contours tell us about effective programming more generally.

We called the project the Effectiveness Initiative despite some hesitation. The word 'effective' is, we feel, one of those words that is used much too glibly in the development field, as if we knew exactly what it

July 1999 Effectiveness Initiative Workshop, The Hague
photo: Angela Ernst

The Philippines: ECD at Mount Pinatubo
photo: Dr S Anandalakshmy

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means. As we have already discovered, effectiveness means different things to different people and this has played a crucial role in helping keep our minds open about what effectiveness is and where it resides.

The Effectiveness Initiative is now underway. The programmes included in the EI represent a diversity of settings and of approaches to early childhood programming (see page 9). Working with each programme is a team of at least four people – some insiders and some outsiders – who are selecting and creating tools appropriate to help them develop an understanding of the programme. While a common framework is being explored at each site (generated by the teams from all the sites working together with a 10 person 'Advisory Committee' of international ECD specialists), teams have also established what the important local issues are for them, and have devised their own ways of exploring them, that are unique to their setting.

From the very beginning, we have conceived of the EI as an opportunity to learn more about what makes

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programmes work in an open and transparent way, sharing our assumptions, confusions and findings as we go along. We begin, therefore, with some candour: we expect to make mistakes along the way, we expect to be surprised, and we are open to changes of direction. We know that we run the risk of asking the wrong questions and we are prepared to share both the excitement of discovery as well as the awkwardness of finding our way. In short, we are at the beginning of a voyage together.

In this issue of Early Childhood Matters we are trying two new things: first, we are sharing a process that we are currently engaged in, as it is happening. In essence, we are showing you several pages from our project diary. We are inviting you to peek in on a developing process and are hoping that this, in turn, will encourage you to react to and contribute toward the further formation of the Effectiveness Initiative.

Second, we are presenting this material in a special edition of Early Childhood Matters that is a joint publication with the Coordinators' Notebook (CN) of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development. In recognition of the collaboration and dialogue built into the EI, we have decided to join forces in this initial publication to reach out to both the Early Childhood Matters and Coordinators' Notebook audiences. Regular readers of the ECM will find the layout and design familiar, regular readers of the CN will recognise the longer, in depth article format that is a CN tradition. As part of this collaboration, Ellen M Ilfeld, Director of Communications for the Consultative Group since 1993, was asked to guest edit this issue; and Judith L Evans, former director of the Consultative Group, has moved to The Hague, as of January 1999, to commit herself full time to the Effectiveness Initiative as Director.

'When ECD works: mapping the contours of effective programming' (page 7) provides an overview of the Effectiveness Initiative; a discussion of what we hope to achieve; some of the assumptions we are making as the project gets underway; what has happened so far; and some of the surprises we have already had. In 'Stories we tell, moments that stay with us' (page 18) we introduce a specific qualitative research technique, which is designed to get at people's own experience of something that has worked for them in relation to early childhood development. We tested this activity with partners in the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development with staff within the Foundation, and with the PRONOEI programme in Peru. The article presents the results from our trial run using qualitative research. It illustrates what can be generated when we open ourselves to different sources, different kinds of data, and different ways of processing them. Each site will determine whether this and/or other methodologies are appropriate to their contexts, as they find ways of soliciting the perspectives of the key players: children; parents; care providers; community planners; intervention agents and others. In future editions of ECD we will describe our experiences with other techniques. We welcome your responses, questions and comments.

*Ellen Meredith Ilfeld, Guest Editor*
*Judith L Evans,*
*Director of the Effectiveness Initiative*
*Gerry Salole, Director of PDC Department,*
*Bernard van Leer Foundation*

* Organisations that belong to the CG consortium include: Aga Khan Foundation; Bernard van Leer Foundation; Christian Children's Fund; Save the Children USA; Radda Barnen; High/Scope Foundation; Academy for Educational Development; Inter-American Development Bank; World Bank; UNICEF; and UNESCO. In addition, regional ECD networks/convenors represented within the consortium include: Arab countries (Arab Resource Collective); Latin America (CIESPAL); Caribbean (Caribbean Child Development Centre); Eastern Europe (Marta Kortmus); Central Asia (IMCDECE); Southeast Asia (Feny de los Angeles Bautista); South Asia Network (Caroline Arnold); and Anglophone Africa (Barnabas Otaala). Visitors at the April 1999 Consultative Group meeting included representatives from Plan International; Redd Barna; a consultant to DANIDA; Ryerson University Toronto; and diverse UNESCO staff.

*The next edition of Early Childhood Matters will focus on participation by children 0-7 years in the conceptualisation, implementation and evaluation of ECD programmes.*

Zimbabwe: discussions between stakeholders
Kushanda Project

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# *When ECD works:*

## mapping the contours of effective programming

**Gerry Salole and Judith L. Evans**

*When visiting a programme or engaged in an ECD-related activity, we all tend to ask ourselves whether the situation appears to be 'working.' Sometimes the sense of what is working is an intuitive, overall impression. Sometimes we are consciously checking off features on a mental priority list we've developed through experience. For example:*
*children are: active ✔ clean ✔ well fed ✔ mentally and socially stimulated ✔…*
*setting is: full of materials children can explore ✔ safe and well-ventilated ✔…*
*adults are: engaged with children ✔ encouraging children to use language ✔…*
*What signals a sense that a programme is working may be quite different for each of us, and is likely to include a whole range of factors that each of us will define according to our own professional experience and goals.*

In order to examine what makes ECD programmes work, and more specifically, what makes them effective, in diverse contexts, for diverse participants and stakeholders, the Bernard van Leer Foundation has launched the Effectiveness Initiative (EI). This is a three-year exploration (1999-2002) that we hope will give us greater understanding of what makes programmes work – for the diverse people who take part in them, and for the communities and cultures that are meant to be enriched by them. It is an effort that will allow us to take a qualitative look at programmes with at least a ten-year track record that are widely considered to be effective, and to develop methods and maps for examining other programmes in the future.

The EI effort is grounded in the in-depth study of ten specific programmes. It is also designed to be a cross-site, cross-agency collaboration and exchange that stimulates ongoing dialogue about effective programming. Furthermore, it is designed to test the application of qualitative research methods, well tested in other development arenas, to the field of

international ECD. The goals of this effort are two-fold: to gain deeper insights into what makes ECD programmes effective, and to activate international dialogue on effectiveness that takes us, as ECD professionals, beyond our present scant measures and indicators of programme success.

For each site, a team of at least four people (some local, some from other sites) will establish the initial site-specific issues to explore, and will set up processes for engaging diverse stakeholders in mapping the evolution, experiences and details of the programme. The teams are supported by a cross-agency Advisory Committee of ECD programmers, policy makers and practitioners from around the world[1]. The teams and members of the Advisory Committee met together as a whole group in July, 1999, to identify a set of basic questions and concerns they wish to examine across all ten sites. They will continue to meet periodically to share their tools, methods, experiences, questions, concerns, and evolving maps of understanding. The methods used by each team will be created or selected from the entire 'toolkit' of options offered by the rich experience of the talented individuals who are taking part in this effort.

Those of us active within the Effectiveness Initiative do not expect to come up with a template of what a successful or ideal programme must have. Rather, we are attempting to map both programme-specific dimensions of effectiveness and to look for patterns that appear to be true across diverse settings. We want to be true to each programme included in the study, but also to extrapolate shared patterns and superimpose them on each other.

One of the primary objectives of the Effectiveness Initiative is to create a set of methods and data that is much broader than, but as persuasive as, current economic analyses of the benefits of early childhood programmes. There are now data available that demonstrate the economic benefits of investment in the early years. But while the early childhood field as a whole has benefited greatly from the research that has generated these data, this should not limit the search for effective ECD programmes. Unwittingly, programming planners and policy makers often allow the economic data to limit their imagination when considering programming possibilities. The economic analyses have focused us on a search for economic outcomes and this narrows understanding of the full impact of effective early childhood programmes, on individual children, families and communities.

Furthermore, the current research findings have focussed attention on centre-based preschool programmes, since this is the early childhood strategy often used as the basis of analysis. Planners have become so susceptible to this that the potential benefits of alternatives such as homebased, parent support, and community development programmes have not been explored in any depth. This project is an attempt to get beyond this, and the qualitative research tools being used in the EI offer us methodologies to complement what has already been researched using quantitative techniques.

Thus, within the Effectiveness Initiative we are asking questions like:

'What makes a programme effective?'
'What makes it work?'
'What aspects of a programme are working?'
'What can we learn from programmes that feel right in one aspect but wrong in another?'
'How does a programme change over time?'
'Are effective programmes always effective, and for different sets of stakeholders?'
'Are they effective in the same arenas?'
'Can a programme that is failing to intervene in one dimension nevertheless be effective in another?'

### The Effectiveness Initiative: getting started

As the EI was being created, organisations working in the field of ECD were consulted as to what programmes they thought were 'effective.' The EI staff at the Bernard van Leer Foundation began by asking partners in The Consultative Group on

Early Childhood Care and Development and this led us to consult others who were there. From this consultation more than forty programmes were identified for consideration. We then contacted the programmes and told them about the project. Where there was initial interest we took the process a step further through dialogue with key people in the programme. This narrowed the field further, and when the proposal was sent to the Board of Trustees of the Bernard van Leer Foundation there were eleven possible programmes, one of which subsequently withdrew.

From January to June 1999, teams of two outsiders (one from the Foundation, one from another programme participating in the EI) made site visits to each of the ten programmes. They met with programme staff, explained the concept and ideas behind the EI project, and presented some of the questions that had arisen so far. There was no blueprint of how to proceed: they were looking for resonance between the EI and the concerns and questions that were arising and being articulated within the programmes. As in all negotiations, there was a need to clarify goals and objectives.

It took a full day at most sites for the notions, assumptions and beliefs behind the Effectiveness Initiative to be understood. However, in each case, over the following two days, the ideas began to take hold and a real dialogue began. It soon became evident that many of the programmes that joined with us were asking similar questions of their own work, and they had other questions they had been asking. Yet, prior to their involvement in the EI there had not been an opportunity to validate or explore these questions.

Ultimately, those who joined the EI found resonance with what we had wanted to explore on a wider scale and could see ways in which the activities of the EI would help them do their work. As a result of the site visits – through the dialogue and discussions – the EI began to take shape.

Today there are ten programmes involved in the Effectiveness Initiative, six of which have received funding from the Bernard van Leer Foundation. They represent geographic diversity and are illustrative of a variety of approaches. The programmes included in the Effectiveness Initiative are listed in the Table.



**Programmes included in the Effectiveness Initiative**

| Country | Programme name and description |
|---|---|
| Kenya | **Madrasa Resource Centre (MRC)**<br>The MRC provides training and ongoing support to preschools in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda that have been created to provide early childhood experiences for Muslim children within the context of their religion. |
| Mozambique | **Assoçiação da Criança Família e Desenvolvimento (CDF)**<br>This evolved from an effort during the war to reunite children with their families. It now focuses on a variety of community based activities, one of which is ECD. |
| India | **Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA)**<br>SEWA was created to support women in the non-formal sector, organising them into cooperatives that are self sustaining. Childcare was added as a component to support women's work. |
| Israel | **ALMAYA – Association for the Advancement of the Ethiopian Family and Child**<br>This programme works with Ethiopian families that have migrated to Israel. It provides children with experiences that honour their traditional culture and prepares them to enter primary school. |
| The Philippines | **Mount Pinatubo Project**<br>When Mount Pinatubo erupted families living at the base of the mountain were resettled in other parts of the Philippines. This programme works with the community as a whole to meet their needs at all levels. A significant activity is home based playgroups for children and families. |
| Colombia | **PROMESA – Proyecto de Mejoramiento Educativo, de Salud y del Ambiente**<br>A community mobilisation project that began 25 years ago in an isolated area of Colombia. Activities within the programme have now been taken over completely by the community itself. |
| Peru | **PRONOEI – Programa No-formal de Educación Inicial**<br>This started out as a nutrition programme 25 years ago in the Altiplano of Peru and evolved into a community-run preschool programme. It then became a model for non-formal education that was adopted by government and was also disseminated widely throughout Latin America and beyond. |
| The Netherlands | **Samenspel**<br>This programme provides a playgroup setting that helps integrate migrant (primarily Turkish and Moroccan) women and children into the Dutch culture. |
| Portugal | **Agüeda Movement – Bela Vista**<br>The movement works to identify and then provide services for children at risk, socially and in terms of special needs. Work is with communities to maximise their access to available services, and with the services so that they more appropriately meet the needs of children and families. |
| Honduras | **Madres Guías – Guide Mothers**<br>Within this programme, mothers are trained to run preschool programmes. The programme has now been extended into the early primary years to upgrade quality and facilitate the transition of children from the preschool to the primary setting. |

> *"As soon as data are reduced we are distanced from what we want to know and understand"*

### The creation of teams

*Teams are evolving and networking is beginning.*

Each programme, in collaboration with EI staff, has been responsible for the selection and preparation of its EI team. Teams consist of four or more people, depending on the needs at a given site. Team members have been drawn from:

- programme staff and local consultants;
- staff from other programmes in the EI;
- staff from the Bernard van Leer Foundation;
- disciplines where expertise is required to better understand a given programme (for example: in statistics, data analysis and cost/benefit studies); and
- staff from international organisations involved in funding ECD programmes.

We are already experiencing the benefits of the synergy of the different programmes, team members and methods coming together as a result of our first workshop that took place in The Hague in July 1999. This workshop proved to be a very stimulating and rewarding launch of the EI. Bringing people together from different programmes was extremely helpful because it was done within a setting where it was safe for people to be open with one another, and where the facilitator worked with the group to create a shared vision.

During the workshop we observed, we learned and several things were reinforced:

- we learned that the open architecture of the project, while initially confusing, permits participants to let themselves ask questions collectively in an open forum, that they previously had hesitated to explore on their own. This has resulted in some questions emerging, and others being formulated more thoughtfully; while those of us involved with the EI are honing our ability to listen more attentively.

- As the skill, knowledge and abilities of the individual team members became more evident to people on other teams, cross-programme exchanges – always a hoped for outcome – began to develop. Teams proposed bringing in specific people to join their team at different points in time. For example, one of the team members from India made the initial site visit to the Philippines. One of the team members from Peru will visit Colombia as part of a site visit to the community involved in the programme there. An individual who is central to the programme in Kenya will be part of the India team, and a person from the Israel programme has been invited to work with the programme in the Philippines. We are anticipating that the addition of one time or focused visits and exchanges will enrich the cross-programme work, and that the number and variety of these exchanges will increase over the life of the EI project and beyond.

- Most excitingly, we have come away from our first joint team workshop with the conviction that people have even more instruments at their disposal than we initially gave them credit for. The workshop also helped people to validate what they wanted to do. This has freed them to use their own tools more confidently, and to create new ones.

The teams at each site are now in the process of developing site-specific instruments and gathering data. We will all come together again in early 2000 to share the process and findings so far, and work on data analysis techniques.

**The development of questions**

*We are asking questions differently and are beginning to hear a different set of questions asked.*

A key to generating understanding will be in the framing of the questions asked within the EI. When we, as development workers and/or funders, ask questions, people can and are willing to respond. However, we need to be aware of the fact that the questions we ask may well limit how people respond, and may not be the salient questions they themselves would ask. We may not have thought to ask the kind of questions that will help reveal the real meaning of the experience for all those involved, and we may not be skilled enough to hear the meaning for the respondents of what they tell us.

It is extremely difficult to move beyond what we already know how to ask and hear while, from the other side, Pearce (1971) would claim that: 'We hear only the question to which we are capable of finding an answer.' (page 70) We are very aware that we have only a very narrow repertoire of questions and tools for investigating those questions. This is extremely limiting. The question for us is: 'Can some new questions be developed?' If so, there is the possibility that we can collectively begin to answer them.

In this light, we also want to validate intuition. We want to help explore the use of tools that will allow us to better articulate or justify our sense that things are, or are not working, without being able to justify that sense by recourse to a checklist or a standardised instrument. We are hoping to add to the development workers' toolkit by creating some additional methods for observation and making sense of the contexts in which programmes are conducted. In a way we need to find adequate language outside the usual research frameworks to validate experiences and so on.

**The development of processes**

*We are developing processes that will provide us with the skills to better listen, understand, and interpret people's experience and situations.*

We knew before we started that it would not be enough to just ask questions, even new ones.

Nor would it be enough to merely repeat what has been said for at least the last 30 years in the development world: that we need to listen better in order to better understand the responses we get; that listening does not mean a condescending, perfunctory half-hearted listening where the listener is drawing conclusions while the information is presented;

Israel: play and fun
The Association For The Advancement of the Ethiopian Family and Child in Israel
Beer-Sheva National Dissemination Project
(poster competition entry)



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July 1999 Effectiveness initiative Workshop, The Hague
photo: Angela Ernst

that listening means finding ways to receive people's responses fully before trying to analyse, interpret or categorise their meaning; that listening means staying open to hearing and seeing and understanding. We knew we would have to go beyond this rhetoric. One way in which we will do this is to turn each person in the EI into an 'outsider' looking in, and simultaneously an 'insider' looking out, at the programme and its context and environment. This approach of combining an 'etic' (outsider's objective) perspective, with an 'emic' (insider's subjective) perspective, will allow us to honour our commitment to getting at what are sometimes self-contradictory understandings of what is being achieved in programmes.[3]



We will also incorporate other successful strategies. For example, within the development organisations working in the majority world, in areas such as agriculture, water and sanitation, and micro credit, a number of strategies have been perfected to try to listen to people and to get an understanding of their lives, their needs and their desires. These include techniques such as Participatory Learning for Action (PLA) that help stimulate conversations that were not possible when communities were only observed by outsiders. These techniques have allowed us to collect new kinds of data. But is that enough?

Robert Chambers' (1997) reflections on the development of the PLA methods, which he has so successfully promoted, reveal that he has realised the limits of open methodologies in getting at meaning. This is partly because it is not enough to only use more open methodologies for the gathering of data. Understanding of meaning can only come if we learn to work more skilfully with the data we generate.

One difficulty in the current use of PLA techniques is that within them the data are sometimes reduced or summed up too quickly. For example, a comparison between how a girl child or a boy child spends the day in a given setting can quickly get summed up as 'Boys are favoured in this culture'. Yet that tells us little about the values, beliefs and practices that lead to boys being favoured, and provides no insight into how one might work within the culture to bring about more gender equality.

Thus, in addition to creating and using rather open methodologies, we need to develop a variety of tools for analysis that provide us with a layered understanding of meaning. It is not a matter of working towards a reductionist summing up of the data to yield one single conclusion. We want to take pictures from a number of angles; not to reduce the complexity of the situation but rather to recognise and explore the complexity as fully as possible. This requires a variety of analytical techniques. Even when brought to bear on a single data set, the use of a variety of methodologies can reveal different facets of meaning. The form of research that we are engaging in sees people as analysers of meaning even as they create it.
(Barritt, *et al* 1979)

At the heart of meaning is language. In both the gathering and analysis of data we are reliant on language. As noted by Barritt, *et al.* (1979), within qualitative research we seek data dominated by language and cultural understanding, not by numbers. Numbers are important, but they should not be the

> *We live our lives embedded in language. So why do we turn to numbers to define our truth?*

only points of reference. The kind of study we are undertaking lives within the tradition of language that has an important history, especially for most of the cultures whose experience we are trying to understand. Language allows us to highlight aspects of experience that might otherwise go unmarked. 'Analysis of language requires rhetorical skill, the attention to meaning, and the struggle to say it right; we cannot escape the tradition; we have to use it.' (Barritt *et al*, chapter 6 p3)

One of the things that excites us about the EI is that it provides an opportunity to validate an approach that allows people to tell their stories in their own language, without our immediately classifying, censoring or interpreting the stories or leaping to conclusions too quickly. Part of our collective work across the whole project is to interpret the stories together, broadening the basis for analysis, in the hopes that this will allow us to truly hear what we are being told.

### Establishing a framework

*We will be producing 'cuts' or 'maps' of programme contexts.*

As the Effectiveness Initiative was being developed, the Advisory Committee met in September 1998, to develop a set of questions that its members initially had in mind about the nature of effective organisations. Those questions were related to different 'cuts' or 'maps' that reflected the histories of programmes.

During the initial site visits, these questions were shared with people as examples of the kinds of things we were interested in knowing more about. People immediately identified with the notion of telling the story of the programme by answering the questions for themselves. In some instances people were already asking similar questions of themselves. In other instances programme staff thought that by answering the questions they could do their work better. And still others saw the opportunity to reflect on their organisational history as a way of guiding their work in the future. Thus, all the programmes adopted this set of questions, and their associated cuts or maps, as a place to begin.

One particular cut that was recommended by members of the Advisory Committee – the project timeline – took on a life of its own during the site visits. This has now been adopted by all the sites as a kind of initial framework upon which the story of each organisation can be anchored. It provides a starting point for people to reflect on what they set out to do and how that has changed over time. In essence, the initial questions, now organised around the timeline, have become a vital, universally embraced tool in the EI toolkit. The timeline incorporates the following 'cuts' or 'maps'.

- *Influences.* This cut consists of a description of all the things that have influenced the programme at different points in time. For example,

Belgium: learning to listen, Liege Pilot Project

Guatemala: tell me your story ...
Quiché Fundaespro Project
photo: Trustee Dr R Freudenberg

these might well include a description of the context (economic, political and cultural) when the programme began; how the context has changed over time; and how those involved perceive that these changes have affected the programme. Within this there is interest in capturing the ways in which serendipity and personal choices have affected the programme; and in gaining some understanding of the resources (financial and physical) available over the life of the programme, and what this has meant for the programme.

- *Attitudes/Stance.* This cut is about people exploring the underlying assumptions (implicit as well as explicit) within the programme. It is an attempt to identify the assumptions of those working in the programme. For example, what are the values and beliefs about children's development and the way children learn, that determine the kinds of activities undertaken in the programme? What are people's beliefs about the value of intervening and about kinds of interventions?

- *The structure of the organisation.* This mapping will produce an organisational chart and a description of how that has changed over time. There will also be information on the leadership of the project and how that has changed (or not) over time.

- *The culture of the organisation.* This cut reveals the culture of the organisation as it is demonstrated by the processes used within the organisation to address problems; overcome obstacles; make decisions; recruit, hire and train staff; and so on. It will also include information on who participates, at what points in time, and in which ways.

- *Linkages.* This mapping will show the kinds of linkages that have been formed with other organisations, individuals, donors, and government; as well as the networks that the organisation is part of and the roles that it plays in those networks.

- *Outcomes.* This cut will show the kinds of influences – looked at from the perspectives of some of the stakeholders – that the organisation has had and is having on others: the children and families involved in the programme; staff; the community; other organisations – And it also includes the broader context (such as government policy).

- *Mapping the future.* This speculative mapping will show how programmes envisage the future and how they see the programme developing over time with respect to: its underlying philosophy; its assumptions, goals and activities; the nature of the organisation; the processes used to make decisions; the kinds of linkages with other organisations; and the nature of the outcomes.

### Telling the story

*The stories are beginning to be told – however, the story of a programme is not self evident.*

One of the things we have begun to realise is that people do not always find it easy or natural to tell their own story; we are all used to censoring ourselves and shortcutting the process. This was so vividly brought home in the first visit made to one of the programme sites. There it became clear that in the telling of a complicated story that is full of twists and turns and different experiences, there was a tendency to take shortcuts, avoid uncomfortable topics and to merely describe the final outcome.

This is compounded by two things: first, that those involved in a programme as implementers or beneficiaries do not necessarily know what it is that outsiders want to know about their story; and second, that generally outsiders are not very good at getting at an experience from the point of view of the person experiencing it. The result is that, if they were to tell the story of the programme, their stories would often not be recognisable to those in the programme. Even if they were to get the story right, they would not necessarily be able to identify the aspects of experience that make the programme effective, or even know whether that dimension is perceived by others as being effective.

Thus, eliciting the story, in all its richness, is the challenge for the ET teams. Here we have to remember that people within the programme have very different perceptions of what has happened over the years: they have different entry points and, coming from diverse backgrounds, each brings a unique perspective to the effort. Putting their story together with the perceptions and experiences of people who are outside the programme adds an additional challenge. Yet ultimately, success will revolve around good, sound storytelling.

The approach to the task and the methodologies being used, place an emphasis on making meaning out of the material we gather, and telling it all in a way that resonates with, and is appreciated by others. Already, through interviews and activities that help provide an understanding of how organisations have arrived at where they are, and what that means in terms of their impact, many stories are being told. Documentation is usually thought of late in the process. However, we want to set processes in motion to tell the story while it is evolving. We have begun to think that each site should have a writer working with them to bring out the story by creating a drama, or producing a film, or writing a novel, or using a variety of media to convey the various aspects of the programme.

### Some assumptions we carry with us

Despite all our best intentions, we are aware that we are not going into this activity with a blank slate, theoretically or in terms of our own practices and experiences. We bring with us a set of assumptions, first of all about how the world operates; and second, about what we are going to find out about effective ECD programmes. We have tried to articulate our assumptions knowing well that such an exercise can only be part of the picture. Some of these assumptions were explicit when we began, some implicit. In either case, nine months into the project, here is what we have to say about our assumptions.

*We have an agenda*

No matter how purist we try to be in being open and in listening and hearing, we do have our own perspective and agenda.

We would not be working in this field if we did not think that we had something to offer to others, yet it is not politically correct to talk about the ways in which we would like to see people's lives changed. We tend to end up working with communities until their needs fit our ability to respond to their needs. One development specialist made the comment, "If we want them to respond we have to teach them to respond.' But, we lose when we have taught people to respond.

As interventionists we have to be conscious of our imposition of goals, perspectives and agenda for action, and understand the impact – positive and negative – of the criteria we are imposing. At the very least we should not delude ourselves that we are working in a completely value-free way.

*We begin with some beliefs about effectiveness*

From our beliefs come assumptions that we make as we try to understand effectiveness. These include that effectiveness:

- *cannot be defined in terms of a universally accepted truth.* There is no single dimension that would make every early childhood programme 'effective'. We are assuming that there are multiple truths and that there is disagreement about what constitutes an effective programme. We are seeking to know where there is agreement in people's experiences and we are trying to understand something of the nature of the disagreements.
- *Is a fluctuating concept.* The effectiveness of an effort changes over time and as a result of changing conditions.
- *Cannot be placed on a linear scale* along which programmes can be ranked from most to least effective.
- *Resides in an organisation,* yet varies within an organisation. Some parts of the organisation may well be much stronger than other parts.

Thus, effectiveness is best represented as a profile that is compounded from the cuts and maps.

- *Takes time to identify and understand. It is not possible to capture an understanding of what constitutes effective ECD programming in a snapshot.* It requires living with and experiencing multiple situations that cannot be reduced to a static study of a single point in time. It requires time to recognise how and when something is effective in process and outcomes.
- *Is the result of experience, and a composite of many experiences.*

### Fashioning tools as we proceed

We are being willingly changed as we assemble, develop or invent the tools that we are using; as we move away from the relatively cosy approaches we know and have trusted; as we struggle to cope with the stresses and complexities of being creative with what we have; as we combine so many different skills; as we try to operate successfully with them; and as we bring them to bear in different combinations for different places and circumstances. For example, we are having to become much more open, much more sensitive, much more quick footed, much more competent in coping with nuanced realities as we take on qualitative research approaches and methods. These offer us validated and tested tools but we have to adapt them to the specific uses and purposes of examining ECD settings, in all their complexity and in the wealth and interplay of dimensions that they embody. They help us to identify new data sources such as stories and anecdotes, interview transcripts, field notes, recordings of natural interactions, and documents, pictures, and other graphic representations; they allow us to carry out studies of human experiences that are not approachable through quantitative methods – and they also change us, and make us different personally and different professionally.[4]

Uganda: learning to express a story. Madrasa Resource Centre/Kiti Muslim Nursery School (poster competition entry)

## Where we are now

In summary, we believe that bringing the use of qualitative tools into the world of ECD, for gathering and processing data, will give a better understanding of what we see and hear and distil from the process: it is the first time for many. We know that in quantitative research it is considered crucial to begin with a fixed/prescribed set of methods and procedures that are to be used with conformity across all study sites. However, in this effort, we are consciously working without a normative blueprint in the hopes that we will be able to identify patterns and individual differences in the case studies that would not appear if we started with a fixed constellation of assumptions. By taking this approach we get both information and process.

It may be that the outcomes confirm what we already knew intuitively. How valuable that would be, given that so much of what we know is not validated by existing research and is not taken into serious consideration when our organisations make programming decisions. However, we feel that the process we are engaged in is of equal or even greater value than the outcomes we might discover. The fact that there are over fifty people embarking on a journey together, and actively engaged in a dialogue together to generate both the questions and the methodologies to address those questions, contributes to the creation of a process that will last far beyond the EI. The cross-site exchanges, the periodic meetings of all the team members to create a way forward together, the frequent exchanges and sharing of information and activities along the way: they all contribute to joint ownership of a set of qualitative research strategies that can be used with a wide variety of ECD programmes.

Over the course of the dialogues with EI participants, the analogy of a river began to emerge as a way of talking about what happens within programmes. Rivers start small. Where they go, their depth, and breadth, are determined by multiple factors within their environment. Some rivers flow along a rather predictable path, but most are diverted from their natural course in some way – and they also create their own courses. At times they are fed by tributaries and widen as a result, covering more ground; at other times they shrink as a result of drought. At times there are dams that impede their progress altogether, or cause them to flood and destroy otherwise fertile ground. Some flow into lakes and maintain an identify all their own; others flow into the ocean and, as part of that ocean, are no longer apart and unique. And as rivers flow and grow, they also shape and influence the environments through which they pass and of which they are a vital part. Like rivers, programmes have progressed, have been influenced and have had influence in their own distinctive ways. As we trace their courses, we can begin to map the contours of the territory that each programme has covered and we can see their influence. Even as the EI is getting underway, we can see that the work will result in new ways to navigate, and that the voyage will have been well worth the effort.

### Notes

1. The Advisory Committee consists of: Robert G Myers (Consultative Group); Kathy Bartlett (AKF); Dr S Anandalakshmy (Consultant); Kirk Felsman (Duke University); Leonardo Yanez (Consultant); Michelle Poulton (CCF); Caroline Arnold (SCF) and Feny de los Angeles Bautista (Community of Learners Foundation).

2. The Consultative Group joined the effort as a partner, and focused their April 1999 meeting on the topic of indicators of effectiveness.

3. It is important to point out that we do not mean to create a dichotomy between literal 'outsiders' and 'insiders' here since we know that both insiders and outsiders can simultaneously hold 'emic' and 'etic' perspectives. We are trying to suggest that it is in the synthesis between these two approaches that a fuller picture of effective programming will emerge.

4. Salole G; *Learning to hear with the third ear: bricolage and its importance for possible new directions in ECD;* (June 1995) address to National Educare Forum, South Africa.

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Botswana: joy in dancing
Kuru Development Trust

Ellen Meredith Ilfeld

# *Stories we tell, moments that stay with us:*

examining your experience with ECD
to gain a deeper understanding
of effective programming and care for
young children and their families.

*Think about moments in your professional (and personal) life that have stayed with you – times when you said to yourself: 'This is it – this is really working' 'This is why I do what I do' or 'This is just horrible!'. Think about the situations that stick in your mind as emblems of what you understand or value. Think about events that in your mind represent the best or worst or most typical ways that children are treated, or that families are living – events that opened your eyes to important perspectives or truths.*

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Colombia: playing and learning on the beach
Costa Atlántica Project

All of us who work in ECD, whatever our professional role, have such moments stored either consciously or subliminally in our mental map of meaning. They are (some of them) highly personal, often charged with strong feeling, and they link somehow to our value system ('This was a perfect example of what I'm working so hard to achieve'. 'This was a perfect example of what's wrong with xxx – governments, parents, our own organisations, other organisations'). These emblematic stories we store in our minds are small worlds of meaning that we understand directly; to explain their significance to someone else is difficult.

Unfortunately most of us are trained academically to overlook these stories and anecdotal 'evidence' as too subjective, irrelevant to the larger picture, or not significant. Yet these stories offer us some important doorways to understanding experience in all its complexity.

1 They reflect our value system, and can reveal our prejudices, emphases, and affinities. They often influence our decisions, whether we are aware of it or not.
2 They show us how our intuition sorts or categorises experience – which may or may not match the way we sort things logically.
3 They often serve as touchstones – motivating us, energising us, and helping us to explain, to ourselves at least, why we make the professional and personal choices we're making.
4 They often serve as mental shorthand for whole complexes of understanding, knowledge and experience that are crucial to our intellectual and emotional understanding of

what we do professionally. (For example, you might catch yourself thinking: 'This is another of those kids-on-the-beach-in-xxxx situations'. Only you know what this shorthand means, but chances are, it is full of layers of meaning for you that would be difficult to explain fully to someone else.)

5 They can offer us a way to break through limited and patterned thinking, if we learn how to 'research' and mine our own understanding in more depth.

What happens if we take the time to articulate and explore our own mental maps of understanding about children, families, and communities, and to identify some of the emblematic situations and significant events that shape our personal and professional understanding? Even the most orthodox guides to social science research advise the researcher to acknowledge his or her own biases. But within social science, the goal in doing this is to be able to somehow neutralise these biases in a study design. This is important if you want to apply rigorous scientific method to the study of human experience.

However, in the discussion that follows, we are going to explore another path: applying rigorous literary/narrative/qualitative research method to the study of human experience. The premise of this is simple: the experiences of children, families and communities are coded, stored and couched in language – both in the language we use to tell our stories, and in the symbolic mental shorthand language we each use to store our understanding. So if we wish to explore what makes a programme effective, to understand the experiences of children, families, and communities at risk, and to gain greater clarity about our own roles in supporting them, we can benefit from starting with a deeper examination of what we, individually and collectively, know from our own experience.

Within the Effectiveness Initiative (EI), our initial exploration has begun with an effort to identify our own experience (as professionals) with effective ECD programming and to examine it in more detail. We carried out half-day workshops with two groups of ECD professionals – members of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development consortium (CG) who were joined by the EI Advisory Committee, and a group of Bernard van Leer Foundation (BVLF) staff members. These workshops focused on an exploration of our individual experiences with moments in an ECD setting when we said to ourselves 'This is really working'. The analysis of the 'data' (in this case, written stories and group discussion) generated through these workshops is presented in the discussion below.

As Evans and Salole indicate in 'When ECD works: mapping the contours of effective programming' (page 7), the concept of 'effectiveness' is large and abstract. Most of us break it down in our minds: what worked in particular situations; what had desired outcomes; what felt dynamic; exciting and productive as a process; and so on.

The workshops were further replicated a month later in Peru with programme staff and the EI team working with the PRONOEI programme, one of the ten sites being explored within the Effectiveness Initiative. Results from that workshop will be presented in a future publication.

July 1999 Effectiveness Initiative Workshop, The Hague
photo: Angela Ernst

One of the CG participants in this exploration quite rightly pointed out that effectiveness and 'it is working' are not necessarily the same thing. An effective programme may have situations that don't work, and an ineffective programme may well have moments that work beautifully. Furthermore, in several participants' thinking, 'effective' programming is linked to outcomes, and examining moments of meaning does not necessarily yield insight into outcomes. However, in the workshops we proceeded to explore the more limited realm of 'moments when we felt a situation was really working', on the assumption that it would give us, as professionals working in ECD, insights into our experiences with the dynamics of effective moments for children, parents, communities and ECD programmes in general.

The insights into 'what works' in ECD settings that emerged from this study do not offer the definitive word on effective ECD programming. They offer instead a starting place for further exploration and study – a collective map of issues and concerns distilled from the stories that stay with us personally and professionally. What they can do is to provide us with more detail about how we shape our thinking about ECD, and to point out directions that individual ET teams might look in their own explorations.

## Methodology

Thirty-three individuals participated actively in the study that I discuss in this article, twenty-five of them at the April 1999 CG meeting in Paris and eight of them at a similar workshop offered to Bernard van Leer Foundation staff. The assignment was to think of a moment in an ECD setting, when you said to yourself: 'This is really working!' We left the definition of 'ECD setting' open: it could include personal or professional moments involving children, parents, ECD planning, or anything else the individual considered to be ECD.

Then, we asked participants to take about 20 minutes to half an hour to describe that moment in writing. We told them their goal was to just tell the story – who was involved, what they experienced, what happened – in as much detail as possible. We encouraged them to just write, without censoring or editing their thoughts, and not to worry about their English or their writing style. (We did ask them to write legibly, and to write their story out rather than just making notes, because someone else would be reading their story.)

July 1999 Effectiveness Initiative Workshop, The Hague
photo: Angela Ernst

After the writing period, we discussed the experience – both the difficulties people had with the activity, and any thoughts or observations people had from writing their own story. Then, while participants took a short break, we selected and made copies of two of the stories (selected more or less at random, though we did choose legible and medium length accounts) for the group to 'code' and then analyse together.

Coding the stories involves going through and underlining each 'unit of

meaning' for the author. For example, in the following paragraph, each underlined phrase is a separate unit of meaning:

> In the Choco project – two years after it had started the mothers and community of Pangui were reflecting about their experience in the 'preschool at home' programme that had come to an end for them: what they had learned, what the children had learned, how the community had improved, how the men were active in improving the sanitation, how they were interacting with other neighbours. They thought collectively about how to continue the experience with their own resources. They decided to build a centre where children could spend 3 hours a day, and the community could meet. Someone donated a piece of land, every person in the meeting committed herself to participating in the construction: clearing the land, getting the sand, the wood and other materials. They appointed one of the 'promotoras' (the educational agent for the preschool at home) as the teacher. She committed herself to work with children and parents. (NB)

The goal in this activity is to work as closely with the text as possible to identify and distil the meaning that the author has encoded there. It also allows the analyser to identify what phrases and language the author uses to express meaning. Several participants jumped ahead and began to synthesise or summarise the main 'message' of the story. Instead, we asked them to stick with a closer sentence by sentence recognition of what was there. Analysis and synthesis is a later step, once you have identified all the pieces of meaning the author has included.

One participant observed that working this carefully with the text made her realise how often she jumps ahead and summarises what she thinks a person means, rather than taking the time to really look at the person's meaning in its own context. She said 'Sometimes when I think I'm listening to someone, I'm actually only hearing my own conclusions about what she must mean'. Another participant noticed that adding the step of 'distilling meaning' allowed her to work with narrative accounts in more detail – she had gathered stories before, but hadn't known how to analyse them once she got them. Carrying out a process of coding and distilling allows you to produce concrete data to work with in your analysis.

At each step of the way, we asked the authors to confirm or refute our observations. It is useful to have the authors there to consult, since the point of the activity is to find out what an experience means to the person telling the story. In a few cases, the explanations the author provided added another layer of meaning to the account – and a deeper way for the group to understand the author's experience.

Once all the units of meaning, or 'themes' were identified in the two stories, we then discussed those themes that were common to the two stories, and those that were significant but individual. This is the same technique that later was applied by a small group of people analysing the full data set of 35 stories. Themes within each story were 'distilled' and then common themes and individual themes were identified. The discussion below was then shaped by the ways that themes appeared to 'cluster' across the stories, and by the ways individuals addressed them. We have used the language of the original story writers (informants) as often as possible, to stick as closely to their meaning as we could.

### Overview

There were 21 women storywriters and 12 men (two individuals wrote two stories). In total, we collected 35 stories about diverse aspects of 'What is working' in ECD. Because we left the parameters open, the choice of topics and perspectives people wrote about are significant: it gives us a range of themes that stand out for us individually and collectively, rather than giving us depth of understanding into one particular experience (another possible way to use this methodology).

Nine of the 35 stories were focused on the writer's personal experience as a parent; all of these were by women. It is remarkable that although the stories were gathered in a professional context, from people who work in ECD, so many women chose to write about a

moment with their own children, or friends' children, as emblematic of when an early childhood setting/situation was working.

Fourteen of the stories focus in on specific interactions between adults and children; 21 stories focus on whole programmes or settings as emblematic of what was working. Similarly, 13 of the stories show a moment of breakthrough or learning that revealed a new insight, and 22 are more generalised descriptions of situations that represent to the writer a perspective, quality or situation they wanted to depict.

The stories take place in 29 different countries, in 12 different kinds of settings:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | family/home settings | – 7 |
| 2 | preschool /centres (kindergarten – 1) | – 5 |
| 3 | community based ecd, intergenerational, family and community activism | – 6 |
| 4 | daycare centres | – 4 |
| 5 | regional training workshops plus international ecd meetings | – 3 |
| 6 | women's groups | – 2 |
| 7 | parent education/mother training groups | – 2 |
| 8 | home visiting programme | – 1 |
| 9 | teacher training | – 1 |
| 10 | university paediatric training | – 1 |
| 11 | family resource centre | – 1 |
| 12 | filming/documentation activity | – 1 |

This reminds us that effective ECD can and does take place in diverse settings. It is perhaps significant that so many people chose to write about the family/home context. This may be because one third of the storytellers chose to write about effective moments with children they knew personally. It may also reflect a professional consensus that for young children, effective experiences in the home and family context are very important.

### Making sense of our ECD experience

*Despite or because of the setting?*

It is not just story telling convention that leads us to start our tales with a description of the place and situation. These elements matter, and in some cases, are the motivations for a programme to be created:

> *Yacambu – This is a bunch of very tiny rural villages in the north end of the Venezuelan Andes. Peasants were running a preschool programme on their own, because the university had failed to provide one. No teacher wanted to go to a place where more than a day journey is needed to visit the small villages around the xx. Therefore a group of mothers decided to create 'family preschools' in each village, and with the support of five universities of that region, they got training and had an education student to visit and plan every week. (MZ)*

The remote setting and difficulty of access to resources led local people in this account to create their own structure for a programme – one suited to the place, their culture, and to the resources they could draw on. The limitations in this situation created a natural 'pressure' for local people to have to get involved, create something for their children, reach out to regional and national resources, and take the lead – in other words to participate in the fullest sense of the word.

Participation – an ideal espoused in many of the stories – was ironically encouraged by limitations in the setting. If a trained teacher could have easily commuted from a nearby city, it is quite possible this set of villages would not have generated such an innovative approach.

> *Almost five years later … the project was spread through the regions to more than 300 communities, a national university is training mothers for early care of children, the regional government has assumed the project as a local strategy to increase the coverage of early childhood care and education and, in Yacambu, peasants have yielded a land ownership to their preschool children, where the parents must work, in order to fund children's meals and dress. (MZ)*

Because the approach was created in response to the setting, it was a viable model for similar communities, and it 'spread' – a theme that appears in several accounts of effective programmes. Spreading is a significant word: it has an organic element to it; it is motivated

Colombia: preparing a community celebration
Costa Atlántica Project

from within, rather than imposed from without by governments or international donor agencies trying to replicate models.

> *A setting is made up of more than its geographical characteristics: a setting may be a remote village next to a stream, where the weather is hot and humid and people gather under the trees or in bamboo huts where they can get shade – and where they traditionally meet and interact. A setting may be a ramshackle set of 'poor communities living alongside a railway line, where material conditions (are) minimal, (and) there (is) so much 'waste' lying around that people could use to make toys or games.' (kb)*

Equally a setting may be a 'village', which through several accounts takes on a meaning that goes beyond a small compound of dwellings. The village is described in terms of its human and cultural arrangement as well as its physical set-up.

> *When I walked around Baragoi I didn't find any brick buildings, but*

*instead an active group of children and some adults under a big shady tree. They were busy playing, listening to stories from the grandmothers, and once in a while mothers would come in to breastfeed …*

*They have a lot of interesting traditional toys, for example, a little donkey made of straw that carries the whole household of the family on its back. The grandmothers use these toys to tell stories of how the Samburu move from one place to another, building their Manyattas (homesteads), and what are the important items they need – a calabash for the milk, cooking pots, rope to tie the animals, long poles to build the home, and so on. (UW)*

In the village setting multiple elements come into play in determining whether the care for children is working; the typical buildings, the streams and meeting places, the cultural habits of the place, and also the traditional cultural habits of the group of people are all called into play and somehow 'harnessed'. The implication is that effective programmes build upon the village that is there and are structured in keeping with the village that is there; the visitor is pleased to find no brick buildings. That would imply imported and superimposed structures from outside. She finds it effective that children are taught about their nomadic traditions, and are taught using the important 'items' of their people.

The importance of the village as a setting for childcare is highlighted poignantly in accounts of people whose villages or home settings have been destroyed: people living in refugee camps and resettlement sites:

*This memory of effectiveness, the 'Ah Ha' experience of 'this is working', took place in a Malawian camp… A programme of early childhood care based on the model of 'Escolinhas' (little schools) was introduced. The project had multiple sites in the camp according to its village structure. The sites were very informal and consisted of trees or thatched roofing to provide shade. They were guided by 'animadores' or adult animators, primarily women, who had received basic orientation according to the practices in Mozambique… (LH)*

Several accounts of people disrupted by war or displacement highlight the importance of recreating a village-like structure, or a cohesive sense of community (in several cases the village stands for the storyteller as a symbol of 'community').

Thus the setting – and its natural features (shady trees, rivers, crops and seasons), as well as its cultural features (traditional items of daily use, languages, work patterns, available people, and stories, songs and dances) is highlighted as a framework which allows an effective programme to arise or be introduced successfully.

All of the accounts praising a village setting as a holistic and rich setting for children are given by visitors, outsiders who find the programmes that build on these contexts effective. Several cite reasons for considering the programmes successful: the programme has spread to other areas; it has been adopted by regional or national authorities; preschools are still running without external funding five years later; they have spawned other community-building activities such as sanitation efforts, political activism to improve infrastructure, training and education for mothers, and so on. Thus, while it would be useful to look further into how children, parents, and other community members experience village-moulded programming, it does seem to stand out as a rich model for the group of ECD professionals who wrote about it as significant to their experience.

There is a thin line between what people choose to set up for their children because of the setting (its limitations and its resources), and what is created despite difficult conditions.

*We came upon a small centre run by the Mobile Crèches (in India), for the infants and young children of construction workers in the NCERT compound. It was a small improvised room of three by four metres or so, and there were about 25 children and three caregivers inside. Three infants were asleep in the hammock (attached to a wooden frame) and looked clean and fed … The facilities were minimal, as was the space. The floor was sanded, and only where the infants and toddlers sat were there straw mats … The centre had been there for four months at the time of our visit … (BM)*

This centre made a deep impression on the visitor, because despite the very 'minimal' conditions, the children were clean, well fed, and active. The daily routine appeared to be so well established after only four months that for the visitor it highlighted 'the organisation and training that must have gone into the programme for it to appear so simple for a casual visitor'. (BM) In this case, like in several others, organisation and training were the factors that were key, despite lack of physical resources, space, or sophisticated equipment.

> *The setting is an early childhood education centre in a low-income neighbourhood of Mexico City … (a teacher is observed having a rich exchange with the children) … Observing this experience, I felt that the curriculum that had been developed and the training that had been provided, was working even though material conditions were not very good and the teachers were not certified. (SH)*

The setting is important, and it may also be irrelevant. If quality programmes can be established despite difficult conditions, then they are often due to curriculum, to dedicated staff (as we will discuss below), to organisation, or to practical training provided to under-educated caregivers. Sometimes their success is due to a 'magnetic pull' (HT) that some caregivers seem to achieve through a combination of a 'bottomless resource bag, a toolkit … a magic bag' (HT) of activities and a dynamic way of working with children and adults.

*Important people, arrangements of people*

> *To an outsider it looked like a 'traditional' arrangement for extended family childcare. However, what the grandmother and mother of the children shared was the mutual need of the arrangement … So extended family care 'works' but not as (I) previously understood. (LB)*

If we understand people, and their inter-relationships, strengths, interests, and motivations, we are touching on an important element of what makes an ECD setting work. Thirteen of the stories touched on moments of personal or collective breakthrough – when something new was learned, small 'moments of happiness' (DP) took place that illuminated something important, when 'what looked like the end of a part of the programme became a new, exciting, and challenging beginning for all of us' (NB) These moments revolve around relationships and interactions that fell into place and allowed children and adults to grow, gain insight, see solutions to problems, and/or change. Some of them revolved simply around a moment of joy, achievement, or pride:

- a parent enjoying a moment of laughter and surprise with her children;
- a father experiencing a moment of breakthrough in learning how to communicate with a multiply-disabled child;
- a teacher using a child's question about a cat to explore a whole world of children's observations and deductions;
- a playing child who is finally, after several tries, able to take some nested dolls apart by herself, and is ecstatic;
- a group of mothers thinking collectively, and through their discussion, arriving at a new plan of action;
- a teacher trying unsuccessfully to interest children through didactic methods, having a moment of release as she throws out the lesson plan and tries something active, that works;
- illiterate parents discovering they could explain their programme to trainers and outsiders, and trainers discovering that they had something important to learn from illiterate parents;
- a mother, discovering through watching a skilled home visitor, that she could also play that role herself.

According to these authors, what makes an ECD situation work hinges on such moments of personal significance and pleasure. The success and effectiveness of the programme, or parenting style, or setting, rested on its ability to enable the people within it to experience success, pleasure, or new awareness.

On the other hand, 22 stories presented more emblematic 'situations' such as an overview of a programme that the writer considered to be working. Within these accounts too, a rich weave of interactions between a vast cast of

characters emerges, far more extensive than one might expect. And in these accounts as well, the people are interacting in ways that seem to 'carry' the meaning and significance of the moment:

- daycare centre staff planning together to help a child to be able to play better with peers;
- paediatricians learning to treat children as serious partners;
- grandparents in refugee camps providing the stories, songs and dances that helped recreate a sense of community; teens in the camps learning to be mentors and teachers for younger children;
- an NGO programme officer asking questions of villagers that lead them into an excited discussion of what their children need and how they might organise themselves to provide it;
- an inter-generational community in which the relaxed, child-friendly atmosphere allows children of all ages to be active, find nurturing when they need it, and to participate in multiple ways;
- outsiders to a programme discovering in the course of an evaluation that the programme leaders know far more about what they are doing than the outside 'experts' would expect;
- ECD professionals learning to find shared language and common terms, through long and sometimes passionate discussion;
- mothers in a rural community discovering that they can collectively put together the resources they need in order to provide safe daycare for their children away from the fields.

The stories revolve around children of all ages, mothers, grandparents, fathers, teenagers, preschool teachers, family friends, caregivers, visitors, village leaders, diverse types of groups, ECD planners, government representatives, trainers, evaluators, collectives and unions, NGO and international non-governmental organisation (INGO) representatives, health workers, and even horses, cats, toys, and dolls.

*Training for whom?*

The word 'training' showed up in six of the stories, and referred in most cases to preparation for a preschool teacher or daycare provider. But another ghostly form of training emerged as a theme: the need for all people involved in caring for children and living within the child's sphere to learn to understand, respect, respond, and work effectively with each other.

Several stories highlighted the need for all people living within the child's sphere to understand about the culture, the community context, and the work and economic factors that affect children, as well as about 'child development'.

With such a wealth of people who are significant to situations that work, the concept of 'training' needs to be looked at far more broadly than it often is. The question of 'training for whom?' is brought up indirectly in several stories: as the outside expert discovers she does not know as much as the 'untrained' people who organised the programme; as it becomes apparent that both the parents and the staff of a preschool centre need to learn more about each other; and as professional trainers of trainers are confronted with their lack of experience with illiterate parents and other grass-roots level programme participants. As one author wrote in a tale of what didn't work:

> *This was <u>not</u> working. By talking <u>with</u> the women a childcare option was evolving. When others (the male organisers there to work with the husbands) stepped in and lectured, the real needs were trampled on as were the ideas and solutions that were coming from the people! (KF)*

If the visiting INGO was to be effective in that situation, it had to go beyond thinking about how to support the women and provide them with training; it also needed to provide consciousness-raising to its own staff and to the men in the villages, and to train itself to navigate more skilfully in a situation where existing gender inequities are easily activated.

In many of the situations that worked, the holistic nature of the setting and the inter-generational population of the programme means that staff are called upon to play multiple roles, and

to interact with many different kinds of people:

> *Twenty children aged two months to twelve years are playing in three different groups, and parents, men and women (three of them are breastfeeding), are seated on the benches, the floor of Ko Miguel's bamboo hut, on the ground, listening to the (NGO's) child development worker who is introducing the day's activity – it's an activity about herbal cures for their children's skin diseases. She had already explained that some time will also be spent after to discuss the vegetable gardens and rice production projects. (GB)*

This is an ECD programme that ranges far beyond the subject matter of child development and child health. One point that is implied by this writer and others is that a setting for ECD does cover more ground than just what happens for young children. Training and support for such a setting must match such an expanded vision.

Thus, in the Yacambu villages cited earlier, when the Peasants' Association asked for training from a representative of the Ministry of Education:

> *They wanted some training for these mothers, (and) other adults, in order to upgrade their ability to teach properly their kids. They also wanted that this training would fit the local context (curriculum). (MZ)*

Training that would fit local context needed to go beyond child development information. It needed to mesh with the realities of the setting (the place was hard to get to), the strengths of the programme (it was organised and run by a very strong peasant's association), the training needs of the people who were involved (the mothers had little or no education, but had plenty of expertise in advocating on behalf of their children and working collectively), the culture of the people, and the home-based curriculum that had already been established.

*Insiders/outsiders and intervention*

Fifteen of the storytellers told their stories as insiders; they were participants with a clear role in the situations they described or they reached back to their personal experiences as parents and workers in ECD settings. Fourteen storytellers told their stories as outsiders; they were visitors or observers, some of them on the scene in order to evaluate, make funding decisions, or provide training and resources at a later date. Six were invisible narrators – the situation was described with familiarity, but the narrator was not present as a participant or observer.



Cameroon: working while breastfeeding
photo copyright Jan Stegeman

But despite this rather even distribution of insider and outsider narratives, the group of people who participated in the study are mostly professionals who work at NGOs, INGOs and donor organisations to help promote ECD and plan or finance programming. Thus they are professional outsiders much of the time, and the whole topic of intervention – the role of outsiders in creating programmes; the programme planning dialogues between intervention agents and community members; the differing agendas of beneficiaries, programme implementers, programme planners, and outsiders – is woven in and out of the stories.

The following six excerpts from accounts of effective programmes (or intervention moments in the first two cases) illustrate the range of intervention stances or roles of outsiders that emerged through the stories. In these examples, the intervention agent acted with various amounts of involvement as: facilitator/listener; animator/activator; resource person/ responder to community requests; funder who helps shape the programme's agenda; programme provider/seed-money funder; programme planner/designer.

*Facilitator/listener*

*A women's organiser was hired (in Northern Pakistan) to begin to focus on women's needs. On one trip I accompanied the women's organiser to several villages where we sat with the women, heard about their lives, and talked with them about their problems. Eventually they talked about issues related to childcare. The women work in neighbouring fields and during the planting and harvesting season, in particular, they are away from home for most of the day. They sometimes bring children along, but this slows them down. Sometimes, a few admitted, they leave the children home alone. This worries them and they feel pulled between getting their work done and caring for the children.*

*We began to talk about how this problem might be solved. When the idea of having an informal childcare set up in the village was suggested, they immediately began to think about how that might be organised. They thought of a woman who would be an excellent one to care for the children. Someone else offered her house since she has a large veranda and a place for the children to play. And the discussion went on … (KF)*

In this example, the intervention agent (a visiting INGO programme officer) aims to take a back seat, describing her role as sitting with the women, hearing about their lives and talking with them about their problems. The seed of a programme appears as a suggestion, perhaps from the visitor and perhaps from one of the women themselves. But the focus of the tale is the engagement of the women themselves as they think of who, how, and in what ways the programme could be formed, using their existing resources.

The implication of this example is that what is working is the women's ability to both identify and decide how to address their problems, when given an opportunity to do so.

*Animator/activator*

*Explaining to a group of teachers from hill-tribe communities (in Thailand) how to translate knowledge and experience into an ECD programme. They have no outside exposure to such programmes; do not know how to articulate needs or how to imagine possibilities beyond their everyday reality. I started speaking at length about the pictures of children and families they presented to me; that early childhood is not just about a preschool building with trained teachers inside. They have clear ideals about how children should be (like the dog, like the stone, and so on). They have a strong desire to knit the generations back into a whole but feel that the youth have dropped out of the community as well as out of school.*

*I discussed how a programme can try to knit the generations back together (child to child, elders and children, new mothers and experienced mothers, adolescents and life skills). How to devise activities to make children resourceful (like the dog) and*

*strong (like the stone). I used the knowledge they gave me, and put it into some programme 'frameworks' that I have learned from other partners. Finally a look of comprehension was coming into their eyes, questions came out, teachers started discussing spontaneously with each other. (MH)*

The key phrase in this example is 'I used the knowledge they gave me', but in fact, the visitor (another INGO programme officer), plays a much more pro-active role, instructing and informing the community, while working from pictures they supply and the stories they tell about them. A similar result as in the previous example is highlighted as important: 'teachers start discussing spontaneously with each other'.

*Resource person/funder*

*I visited Yacambu in 1995 as National Director of Preschool Education for the Ministry of Education … When I was there, the peasant association leaders asked me about three problems:*
*1. they needed a place to continue, because their own houses cannot be used in crop season.*
*2. They needed some money for (a) student, so she can be there beyond the academic year. They also wanted some payment for the 'teacher-mother'.*
*3. They wanted some training for these mothers, (and) other adults, in order to upgrade their ability to teach properly their kids. They also wanted that this training would fit the local context (curriculum). (MZ)*

In this example, the community has already held its discussions, presumably without the need for an outside facilitator/animator, and has identified what it needs. So the role of the intervention agent, in this case a government representative, is to fund what needs to be funded. In this story it is clear that the government agent in fact supported the programme plans as presented, and thus played the role of resource supplier.

*Funder who helps shape the programme's agenda*

*The women's group began to contact other organisations for assistance, both financial and pedagogical … To fund the teacher's salaries and operations, they relied on their own resources and donor funding (an international NGO). Concerned about the sustainability of the programme, the INGO helped fund a revolving loan fund for income generating activities, whose profits would be reinvested in the preschool. (UM)*

Within this excerpt, initiative has also come from the community. However, the donor organisation plays a more active role in shaping the programme, by introducing its own concerns about sustainability. In a number of the stories, the donor-introduced agenda of sustainability is mentioned. In this account, the storyteller tells us that it is in fact doubtful that the programme was able to become self-sustaining, since the income-generating aspect of the programme was not particularly successful.

One might be tempted to attribute this lack of sustainability to the fact that it was a donor-introduced concern. And it is true that those programmes that are described as having 'spread' (implying grass roots replication) also seem to have taken root in their contexts. However, the following example, with a donor-introduced concern for sustainability, claims more success with longevity.

*Programme provider/seed-money funder*

*In one hotel ballroom (used for refugees in war-torn Croatia) we find a couple of displaced Ph.D., several teachers, nurses. Out of the chaos, the misery of displaced status, it becomes possible to develop a recognisable preschool activity. Women … began to take charge of their new context. Preschool groups became organised – associations formed. The principle, applied first successfully on the Croatian Coast, could be carried forward into Bosnia and beyond … Associations could be supported and could learn to generate their own resources for their own future. 60,000 children and 60% of the centres still stand five years later. (FW)*

It is possible that because this programme activated preschools in a place where kindergartens existed before the war, and built on talents already present within the group, there was a

strong basis for sustainability. In other words, ownership of the idea was implicit in the setting, so it did not function as a donor-overlay. In this example, while the donor is activating talents found within the group, both the initiative for forming preschools and seed funding for implementation is provided by the 'outsider' INGO.

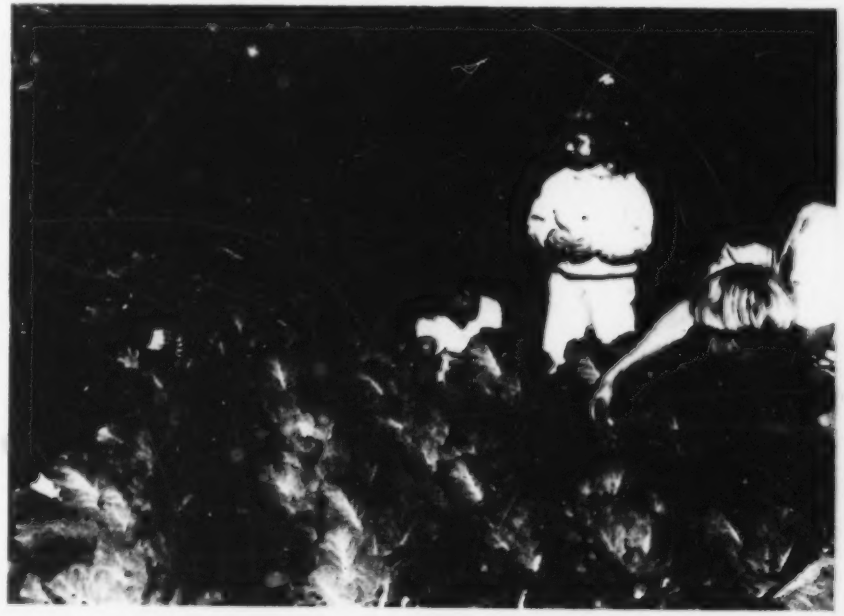
*Programme planner/designer*

> *In 1991, I was part of an initiative intended to respond to psycho-social needs of Mozambican refugee children living in camps in Malawi and Zimbabwe. Following a series of visits to generate a situation analysis, we concluded that two of the most vulnerable populations were preschool aged children and adolescents …*
>
> *A programme of early childhood care based on the model of 'Escolinhas' (little schools) was introduced …*
>
> *The actual Ah Ha! experience was based on watching the intergenerational exchange and realising that multiple needs were being met at one time as the resources of each 'group' were being drawn upon … Visits with a randomly selected group of parents, many of them single mothers or on their own, suggested broad support for the project. (LH)*

In this example, a programme that was considered highly effective was in fact planned by a visiting group of outsiders (accompanied by some insiders) who assessed the needs, designed the programme, and provided the funding and training for the local implementers. In this situation, the author attributes the success of the programme to the fact that what it provided was an excellent match for the people being served – it met their multiple needs and drew on the resources of each sub-group within the population.

In summary, a range of intervention styles emerged as effective in this group of professional *outsiders'* experience. Questions that emerge as we look at these stories aren't answered within the accounts: how does the intervention agent's role enhance or detract from the effectiveness of the project? Under what conditions is each intervention stance most effective?

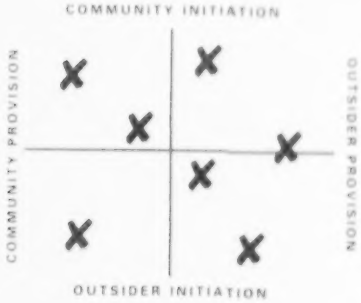
We see from the story of the visiting Education Minister, that when a community's agenda is fixed or processed by the community, provision of funds and services can be an effective intervention. On the other hand, in the first example, in which women from Pakistan began to shape their concerns and solutions, a coda is added to the story, turning it into an example of what doesn't work. The male organisers, who had not been part



Brazil: working in our garden
Criança Rural Project

of this effective process, met with women in two additional villages, lectured them about what the donor would provide (cars and buildings – this was untrue) and destroyed both the rapport that had been developed, and the willingness of the women to participate. The effort fell apart in the face of offers of funds and resources from outside, and no programme could be established.

It is possible to create a grid with 'who initiates' on the vertical axis (community initiation – outsider initiation) and 'who provides the programme' (community provision – outsider provision) on the horizontal axis, and find successful programmes anywhere within the grid.




Thus, it appears that having a programme initiated by the community is not necessarily the magic ingredient that makes a programme successful or valuable. Instead, the question of what makes an ECD programme work appears to reside partly in the quality of the match between the following factors:

- needs existing within the community, and what the outsider has identified and has to offer in relation to the need;
- needs recognised or identified by the community, and recognition that this can be provided by the outsider;
- talents and resources existing within the community, and the ability of implementers/insiders and outsiders to build on these;
- resources supplied from outside that match community recognised needs;
- sensitivity and skill on the part of the intervention agent, and identified or perceived needs of the insiders;
- a felicitous combination of personalities;
- timing – the right idea at the right time;
- cultural readiness for the intervention/activity at the time that funding or other resources are available.

While it is far too ambitious in the scope of this small study to try to pin down what makes these particular programmes work, it is possible to look across the descriptions to get insight into some of the factors that were highlighted as important.

*Watching and listening intently*

This theme emerged most directly when people were talking about children, who are described as 'watching and listening intently'. This will be discussed later in more detail. However, the theme also appears as a strong implication in accounts of adults who play an intervention role, who are trainers, and who are visitors to a situation: 'After a long observation of what they were doing I found out that …' (ET); 'All the adults of the house, and the adolescent too, were drawn one by one into the room where the activities were going on and were spellbound by the proceedings … The mother said to me: It looks so easy! Even I can do this …'(HT); 'I saw the settling in process applied in practice …' (NL); 'We were watching behind a one-way mirror but quickly felt drawn into the room'. (KR)

One of the examples above (of an intervention situation in Northern Pakistan) also emphasises the importance of watching and listening. The visitor sat with the mothers, listened to their stories and later watched their reactions as the men lectured to them. Through this observation, she picked up the cues for what her input and contributions should be. The accounts of visitors viewing programmes are full of observations made through watching. It becomes apparent that the storywriters consider it valuable for them to have time and opportunities to stand apart from the 'action' and observe.

*We talked on and on*

> *The focus of the meeting was on networking. We were hearing the reports, region by region, of what had happened in ECCD in various places and what various organisations had been trying to do… once people started reporting, the details got richer and richer, and the discussion got more animated and engaged. I don't remember exactly what moment I said to myself 'this is working'. I just*

*remember feeling more and more excited, as I realised that the work was just moving steadily ahead. Sure there were problems and issues, but you could see all the willingness and hard work that had gone into making the regional efforts go forward … (FN)*

The role of talk was highlighted in the stories for two main purposes: 1) as a way to create common ground, common understanding between people within projects and between project people and outsiders, and 2) as a tool in collective problem solving.

There was a differentiation between talking to or at someone (lecturing – considered a negative trait), and talking with/discussing. In several stories, there was an effort on the part of the narrator to impart information in a context – the visitor to Thailand shared her programme experience in relation to pictures and explanations that the villagers themselves had provided. In this way, she avoided preaching or lecturing, and was able instead to share her knowledge in the context of a dialogue.

*They thought collectively*

*In a regional workshop, with a group of ECD practitioners from several Arab countries, a long discussion (was held) about which Arabic terms to use as equivalent to 'care' and 'education', and which of them reflected their practice; it was a 'collective mind' in operation, not easily in agreement with itself, but it worked …*

*What helped the exercise to 'work' was a fairly successful 'facilitation' process, which created a neutral space for strongly-minded professionals to interact passionately but positively. (ZI)*

Collective mind is significant in effective discussion and group work – it relates not only to problems being solved through a group discussion, but also to a process of integrating diverse individuals into a shared understanding of problems. It involves creating a shared language, literally in some of the stories and metaphorically in others. It also acts as a springboard for activism.

*… two years after it had started the mothers and community of Pangui were reflecting about their experience in the 'Preschool at home' programme that had come to an end for them: what they had learned, what the children had learned, how the community had improved, how the men were active in improving the sanitation, how they were interacting with other neighbours. They thought collectively about how to continue the experience with their own resources. They decided… (NB)*

As several writers pointed out: concern for children is a motivator for adult activism:

*Then the discussion continued. 'So, what else do you women do? Just make toys?'*
*'No, we do lots of other things. We have got together to clean away the garbage in the streets. We have built a wall to keep the river from flooding the village. We have made pig pens. And we have even written a letter to the President of the Republic telling him that we too are voters and he had better get a road built through to this place'*
*'And all this in the name of a preschool programme?'*
*'Yes, sure. We do all this for our children.'*

*Lesson – women in groups get highly motivated through engagement with their children. The motivation is sparked off, but if properly guided, will not end there. (FW)*

*Properly guided*

This notion of guidance wafts into the accounts in the guise of facilitation, donor input, expert participation in 'dialogues', role modelling and reference to dynamic community leaders, trainers and others whose role is to help steer discussions, help shape programme designs, help educate people.

In relation to adults guiding children there are clear techniques set out by several writers:

*The positive, gradually introduced (encouragement to open up) what he was doing, while respecting that what he was doing was fine, made him*

*start to enjoy playing together (with other children). (TF)*

In other words, with children, it is important to start with where they are, introduce new ideas through encouragement and exposure to new possibilities, while respecting what the child does on her/his own. With adults, this same value is implicit in the ways storywriters described their roles in intervention situations. When an outsider oversteps the attitude of guidance-as-a-mutual-exchange, it becomes a negative feature:

*The idea of the session was to have the mothers, grandmothers working in this setting explain what it was all about. So the trainees were given the opportunity to ask questions and dialogue with the women (the majority of them illiterate), to get a description of what the project was and why it was good to have it in their particular neighbourhood. Most of the trainers were Trainers of Trainers and had never really worked directly with parents, let alone illiterate mothers, and at first were lost, as they could not use the usual techniques they were accustomed to and some of them (were) having difficulty to admit that ... (BC)*

In this example, trainers were not used to being the learners, and were lost in a situation where their guidance was not being sought!

*They have clear ideals for their children*

Just about everyone has ideals for children – the parents, the community leaders, the outsiders who wish to intervene. One way ideals are used is by listening to parents, and using their own ideals and aspirations for their children as a starting point for discussing programme options. As the Thailand visitor mentioned, 'I discussed how a programme can try to knit the generations back together ... How to devise activities to make children resourceful (like the dog) and strong (like the stone).' She built upon what the parents and teachers told her they wanted for their children.

A second way ideals arise is when the outsider teaches or creates an appetite for an ideal. For example, a programme to teach parents of severely-handicapped infants focuses on having parents learn how to interact with their children in simple and non-verbal ways, and then practice that interaction, until the rewards create a strong appetite and value for communication.

*This very small interaction continues for 4–5 minutes and then the boy turns his head very slowly towards his father and gives him a broad smile – the first smile ever! (he is about 12 months old! and severely disabled). The father's and observing mother's/staff's happiness cannot be described ... (BE)*

There is hesitation on the part of storytellers to discuss the 'values' and 'ideals' they are in fact trying to introduce when they act as intervention agents. Yet glimpses of such activity appear: in situations where outsiders are trying to strengthen the roles and powers of women within cultures that don't value women's autonomy; in situations where donors ask programmes to include elements aimed at making them sustainable; in programmes where preschool is introduced as an organising factor for disrupted communities, when ECD may still be an acquired taste for those communities.

This hesitation to discuss NGO's ideals, funders' ideals, and even government and private sector's ideals for children directly, makes it difficult to identify how these imported or highlighted values influence what happens within ECD settings. Yet there were clear indications throughout the stories that outsider-defined ideals, cultural practices, curricular practices and beliefs about child-rearing, all play a role in what is happening within these programmes. Sometimes that role is positive, sometimes disruptive, and often mixed.

It would be useful to focus on the question of 'whose ideals and values' have been adopted and integrated into the formation and evolution of effective programmes. What difference does it make if a programme is built on people's traditional values or if, in fact, a programme strives to introduce 'new' values and ideals?

Botswana: sibling care
Kuru Development Trust

## Community participation, community commitment

The majority of stories that focussed on programmes, group settings, and community settings mentioned community participation as a marker of a programme's success. A sub-text, though, is that parents and communities are not just participating; they are committed to the programmes, they are active, and they ultimately take ownership.

Participation is variously spelled out as:

> *Community participation in the management of the school, running all the way from food preparation to paying teachers' salaries, to physically constructing the school itself, to fund-raising, to starting agro/animal husbandry projects, to support the school. (UM)*

> *They got training and had an education student to visit and plan every week. They also gathered money to buy food for children's breakfast and lunch … They mobilised private enterprises, local government and they were trying to get a broader support from universities and national government. (MZ)*

> *The methodology was very participatory. Mothers had the opportunity to share their experiences and reflect about how they were raising their children, their own attitudes and beliefs, and how to use resources of the environment in a more productive way for the benefit of their children, families, and community. (NB)*

In these stories, parents are identifying their own needs – sometimes at the instigation of dynamic community leaders, or in response to outside facilitators – and are identifying resources they can tap amongst themselves, and resources they can pursue in the local, regional, and national infrastructure. They organise themselves and others, they set conditions, in some cases, on the help they do receive – refusing support that deflects them from their purposes. There is a balance in the stories between defining community participation as *response*, as *activism*, and as *initiation*.

## They explained

What is set out as an ultimate ideal of community commitment is that community members have taken ownership of a programme. One key marker for this in many stories was the fact that community members and participants in the programmes could explain what they were doing with and for children, and why they did what they did, and could articulate for others what that meant in terms of children's development.

> *And what came out was that those illiterate women were actually explaining basic early (childhood) concepts in simple words to the trainers. For the organisers of the workshop (myself included) this little dialogue … was a clear indication that the project the mothers were running … was working, as they could explain the project and what they felt about it. Their words showed that they had taken ownership of the project. (BC)*

> *One important thing is that they (the community parents/organisers) used every chance to promote their project, like an international meeting of coffee growers in Costa Rica … These people have just been invited to international meetings to present their project. (MZ)*

*They used their own resources*

The goal of sustainability, as mentioned earlier, appeared in the stories as a donor-driven goal with only moderate success. One notable exception was a programme that was ending, which women decided to continue on their own:

> *They thought collectively about how to continue the experience with their own resources. They decided to build a centre where children could spend three hours a day, and the community could meet. Someone donated a piece of land, every person in the meeting committed herself to participating in the construction: clearing the land, getting the sand, the wood and other materials. (NB)*

This form of community ownership takes the discussion full circle to the question of community commitment. As outsiders, the donor community tends to stress outcome markers to measure the success of a programme: programme longevity and community take-over of programme maintenance are considered primary goals to work toward. But in several of the stories, other equally valued dimensions of programme effectiveness were evident at the beginning: the community recognised a need and activated itself; the community responded to opportunities offered by a visitor; the community participated, had meaningful experiences along the way, and changed its ways of taking care of children because of what it learned, even in the course of a short-term project. How can these process-related 'successes' be factored into our understanding of effectiveness?

In the following section, we look at what the 'insider' and event-focussed stories tell us about the impact and growth and success of individual moments that worked, individual interactions that created an opening, and individual experiences that stayed with the storyteller and were formative in the choices they make as parents and ECD professionals.

## Experiences of, with, and for children

*Adults planning for children's success*

> *My son had difficulty in playing together with other children. On his own he would be fine but with others he would feel lost and started to show difficult behaviour …*
>
> *The daycare centre staff started to sit him in the group and asked him what he would like to do. His preferred toy would be offered. Gradually (this took some time, but at least he stayed at the table with other children) the staff started to make references in a positive way about what he was doing – involving both my son and other children. This stimulated him and made him proud to show what he'd done. The next step was to ask him to 'teach' other children how to make a puzzle. Slowly he began to see that it was fun doing things together. (TF)*

This is an excerpt from a story about a two and a half year old boy in a daycare setting that we used in one of the workshops for our group discussion. Even at first glimpse, it is rich and full of themes:

- difficulty playing together
- on his own
- he would feel lost
- show difficult behaviour
- staff started to sit him in the group
- would ask him
- what he would like to do
- his preferred toy
- would be offered
- gradually (this took some time)
- stayed at the table with other children
- staff started to make positive references
- about what he was doing
- involving both my son and other children
- this stimulated him
- made him proud
- show what he'd done
- the next step (steps in process)
- ask him to teach other children
- how to make a puzzle
- slowly he began to see
- it was fun
- doing things together

The story brought up discussion of many aspects faced by young children in care settings, including the planning that these teachers carried out in order to provide a consistent experience for the child, the opportunities and learning it involved for him, and ultimately the pride and engagement that resulted as the plan was carried out successfully over a period of about six weeks.

Each of these themes is worthy of exploration in its own right. For example, the theme 'He would feel lost' – what is it that makes children feel lost, compared with feeling 'found'? And what can adults, other children, and environments do to help children find anchors?

However, after the workshop group had given much consideration to the factors that emerged as part of an effective moment for her son, the mother confessed that although she had chosen the moment as a particularly effective one, what had not emerged in her story was the ambivalence she felt. Did a two and a half year old boy need to play together with other children? Would he have done better to just play on his own until he had outgrown his discomfort with others? Was his negative behaviour perhaps a signal that he shouldn't be in such a large group setting at all?

This ambivalence, between admiring the planning and skill with which her child was helped to adapt to a situation, and wondering whether the goals for him were imposed, brought up a whole discussion of adults' expectations of and goals for children. What is the healthiest and 'best' experience for the child in a setting, and what are the best and healthiest settings that are possible for each child?

The stories addressed these questions on many levels, by identifying elements of the experience for children and adults in ECD settings, and by bringing up resonant moments that stayed with the story writers from their own childhood or their children's early years.

Several storywriters identified planning and organisation as the reasons why settings for children worked. They admired the well established routines that allowed children to feel safe, to interact without chaos or conflict. Smooth behaviours were cited as evidence in several stories that this was a well conceived and well designed setting, and the absence of difficult behaviours (crying, clinging, and fights among children) was identified as evidence that children were getting their needs met. On the other hand, one writer spoke of 'busy noise' as a sign that this was a vital and quality setting for children.

Consider some of the following 'markers' of a successful setting, as presented within the stories:

> *Three infants were asleep in the hammock … and looked clean and fed … Five or six toddlers were in a small circle … There were about ten children 4-6 years of age listening to a story. One or two children were helping the caregiver with her task of getting the mid-morning snack ready. One child – a boy – was in a corner with a doll in his lap, very quiet, just hugging the doll. There was some free movement and some conversation among the children, but there was no shouting. No instruction was given to the children to be quiet.* (BM)

> *They (a multi-age group of children) were busy playing, listening to stories from the grandmothers, and once in a while mothers would come in to breastfeed. It was all done in a very natural and child friendly way. The parents bring water and fire wood each morning, and the project makes sure the children get a meal of porridge. When times are good and there is a lot of milk, parents also bring extra milk for the children.* (UW)

> *Nidi and Suresh are in the market learning area using stones as weights to buy potatoes. As Nidi and Suresh choose and discard stones to create a balance for the tower of potatoes, Saibu, the student teacher, observes the process – the process of Nidi mentoring Suresh, learning about heavy and heavier, using play as a learning tool, and the quiet yet intense concentration of other children as they collaboratively succeeded in balancing the scale, and then take great delight in knocking all the potatoes off the scale.* (MA)

Kotlakistan, Pakistan: comfort in a daycare centre

Two of the three examples focus on centre-based care; the middle example might be called 'village-based' care; all three are situations where children are living in poverty. Thus it is no surprise that the health and care aspects of children are highlighted (as they are in several other stories): children are clean and fed, often with snacks or meals provided by the programme, and when possible brought in by the parents. If they are younger children, mothers come in to breastfeed. In the first example, the writer goes on to explain that children and their clothes are washed when they arrive at the centre, if they need it.

Breastfeeding is mentioned throughout the stories, both from a nutrition perspective, and as a way the youngest children are getting nurtured. Other forms of nurture arise: a boy is cuddling a doll, a young child playing with a grown-up sits in her lap while exploring a new toy, a three year old whose mother is giving birth to a younger sibling is given the role of 'chief cuddler' to support her mother and be part of the experience.

These successful settings have a balance of interaction and quiet activity. Children are gathered in circles for singing, playing games, listening to stories; children are off in corners playing quietly, or alone, hugging a doll. In all three excerpts, and in other stories as well, children have freedom of movement. They are not restricted to desks or expected to sit in one place.

Peru: today I'll build with tins, tomorrow with barrels
Ate-Vitarte II Project

Play is highlighted as the primary task children engage in; in fact it is notable that little direct teaching appears in the accounts. The settings these authors selected are ones in which children learn through exploration, interaction, and doing. They are playing with potatoes, stones, toys, dolls, counting toys, puzzles, and other materials that can be manipulated and used in role-play. One author highlighted role-play as a particularly important element for her. 'One of the things that worked for myself as a child and in being a teacher has been role play … Being able to express things through 'somebody' has given (me) room to showing feelings and emotions in a non-threatening way.' (bb)

*Watching and listening intently*

As mentioned earlier, watching and listening play a strong role in most of the stories. For children, watching is a form of learning:

> *A male teacher had an infant on his hip while he was helping two preschoolers with a building task at a table. The infant was watching the two children intensely and listening to them. (Much more interesting than a mobile designed specifically for infants). (KR)*

The emphasis on children watching and learning from older children, and being able to move in and out of the 'action', is as strong in the stories as the emphasis on active learning. This watching and listening activity takes place in the context of descriptions authors give of rich environments – where children and adults of all ages are gathered, where multiple levels of activity are going on, and children have the freedom to move in and out. Thus this mode of learning may be particularly tied to situations that provide such a rich and 'holistic' environment for children. In the example of the two and a half year old boy having trouble playing with peers in the daycare centre, cited at the beginning of our discussion of children, there does not appear to be much room for the child to watch and listen and find his place among his peers over time; and that is possibly the root of the mother's ambivalence about the teachers' well-planned technique, despite its success.

One story, in which the writer never directly states why he has chosen this as an example of a moment that is working, sketches this form of rich environment learning in a cinematic way:

> *Two very small girls – maybe three years old – show up … They walk through the activities, sometimes asking questions (usually of each other) and often laugh. After a while they stroll away. Later, I see them sitting in the middle of a field, talking earnestly together … When the preschool takes a break, they join a group of*

*children who are making a dam in a drainage ditch … At lunch time we find them sitting on the knees of two of the village grandmas, talking with them …* (KT)

In this account, we see a form of 'active learning' that is not engineered; the village itself offers the learning areas, and there is little adult guidance or effort to make each activity 'developmentally appropriate'. The prevalence of this phenomenon in the stories brings up some questions, which might be fruitful to explore: what do watching and listening offer to a child, in the overall learning process? What opportunities for watching and listening are available within a child's care situation? To what extent does a programme strive to provide a 'rich environment' approach, and to what extent does it focus on planned learning?

### *Something familiar, something new*

A good deal of attention is given to how adults support children, both in their transitions into the care setting, in learning new things, and in situations of change, such as the birth of a new sibling.

*Days before, Lina and her two friends had spoken at length about how to include (three year old) Juanita and make the experience positive … the adults concluded that participation without fear for her mother's well-being was the goal … The two friends, whom she knew well, prepared (her) with games and activity, including forays outside to see friends and neighbours … Juanita had talked constantly about the birth and new baby for weeks … but although curious, was not insistent about being present at the moment of the birth. She knew enough to be cautious …*

*(The whole experience) was joyous. Each person had a role. The three year old was informed and engaged, but not overwhelmed. Her impulse – to cling to her mother – was anticipated and validated. Her community was there to support her, direct her, and reinforce her role as a child who could explore, walk, play, talk, share with friends, help her mother, and even help her new sibling.* (DP)

In this experience, the adults have planned together to create a role for Juanita, to help her know what to expect, to make sure she has familiar toys and people around her, and most important, to make sure she has a clear role in her family's change.

The line between home and the school or care setting is more blurry than you might expect; the themes apparent in helping a child at home cope with the birth of her sister emerge as well in a story about a transition into preschool:

*In Hungary, there is about a two week period (called 'settling in' period) for each child when the mother or any other family members can come and be with the child at the centre … During the first days, the mother does all the caregiving routines (washing hands, diapering or toileting, and so on) and the caregiver just observes and assists … Later, as the child grows more confident, the caregiver takes over these tasks … It is considered to be one of the 'turning points' (or first signs of settling in) when the child allows the caregiver to wash him or to feed him.* (NL)

In both stories, there is an effort to help the child recognise the familiar elements of the setting, and then to support him/her in adjusting to the new elements. This is also a theme we discussed earlier in terms of adult learning and training – the practice of starting with what the child/adult knows and is comfortable with, and gradually adding new information, experiences, and challenges from there.

### *Small moments of happiness*

This phrase was written in the margin of one person's story. It was an observation made by one of the workshop participants that many of the stories of successful ECD settings revolved around small moments of happiness. The words joy, laughter, fun, busy, and excited appear again and again in the stories as markers that the moment was working. Joy, satisfaction, and pleasure are highlighted in the stories as a strong source of motivation, and as an indicator of success. Pleasure arises from a sense of accomplishment, and engenders pride – in its positive sense of the word. In the stories, both children and adults

feel proud when they can accomplish something they are trying to do: the three year old in daycare felt proud to show what he could do; the mothers who organised their own community centre felt proud to be meeting their own needs. Being able to do something makes children (and adults) want to participate.

Several writers link pride with respect: children (adults) feel proud when adults (children) respect them. They highlight adult respect for children, and giving children choices, as the two ways that children develop a strong sense of competency, the belief that they can accomplish what they want to accomplish, and that they belong.

Respect is linked strongly to communication. Almost every writer who mentions the importance of respecting children, and 'treating them as serious partners' (ET) points out that this is accomplished though communication, through talking with children, listening to them, and taking them seriously.

Communication, in turn, is linked back into affection and love (of children for adults and adults for children), which abound in the stories of adult-child interactions:

> *What I observed is that children loved her and always wanted her attention. This is because she talked to them as one would talk to another adult and not a child … Many times if we were in the middle of conversation a child would come up to her. She would interrupt our conversation and listen to the child FIRST. This was unusual in the context of Tanzanian society, where children are not supposed to interrupt adults.* (TT)

Thus it appears that for many of the writers, love, pride, respect and joy are the key markers of an ECD setting that is working.

### Where do we go from here?

One message that emerges strongly from this study is that understanding child development goes beyond understanding developmental psychology. It means understanding the whole experience of childhood and learning, in the community and care context where children live. Because of this, we can not make assumptions about what children need, without understanding the specific dynamics of the situation in which they live, and without a rather detailed awareness of what we – as outsiders – and what they – as insiders (children, parents, caregivers, community) – value, offer, and are prepared to accept and embrace.

This methodology allows us to

- focus on a particular setting, question or concern;
- generate a data set by gathering people's stories of specific moments and situations – it does not require long agonised essay writing or analysis on the part of the informants;
- use these stories as a way to identify common and shared themes; and
- use them as a basis for a more informed dialogue with and among the people who are living the experience.

Within the Effectiveness Initiative, each of the ten sites will need to identify their own shared themes and concerns. This study has highlighted some cross-cutting questions that might be of interest to explore in each site:

- How does the role of outsider intervention affect a programme's process and outcomes?
- What values for children are embedded in the ways programmes operate, in the perceptions of 'insiders' to the programme?
- How do the values of the various stakeholders in an effective care setting mesh with each other or complement each other?
- What kinds of effects of a programme, beyond its academic outcomes, should we be identifying – what are a programme's impacts on the people, setting, and systems involved?


Further reading

Coffey A and Atkinson P, *Making sense of qualitative data* (1996) Sage Publications, London

Denzin NK and Lincoln YS (editors), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (1998) Sage Publications, London

Moustakas C, *Phenomenological research methods* (1994) Sage Publications, London

Kenya: mothers supporting their children
Children of Kiwanja Kimaye Child Development Project

# About the Bernard van Leer Foundation

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation based in The Netherlands. It operates internationally, concentrating its resources on early childhood development.

The Foundation's income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer (1883-1958), a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist who, in 1919, founded an industrial and consumer packaging company that was to become Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer NV.

During his lifetime Bernard van Leer supported a broad range of humanitarian causes. In 1949, he created the Bernard van Leer Foundation, to channel the revenues from his fortune to charitable purposes after his death. When he died in 1958, the Foundation became the beneficiary of the entire share capital of the then privately owned Van Leer enterprise and other assets.

Under the leadership of his son Oscar van Leer, who died in 1996, the Foundation focused on enhancing opportunities for children growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage to optimally develop their innate potential.

In seeking to achieve this objective, the Foundation has chosen to concentrate on children from 0-7 years of age. This is because scientific findings have demonstrated that interventions in the early years of childhood are most effective in yielding lasting benefits to children and society.

The Foundation accomplishes its objective through two interconnected strategies:

1 an international grantmaking programme in selected countries aimed at developing contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood care and development; and

2 the sharing of knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development that primarily draws on the experiences generated by the projects that the Foundation supports, with the aim of informing and influencing policy and practice.

A leaflet giving fuller details of the Foundation and its grantmaking policy is available, as is a Publications List. Please contact the Department of Programme Documentation and Communication, at the addresses given on the back cover.

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